

NOVEL

4

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LONER LIFE ◆ IN ANOTHER WORLD ◆



Table of Contents

[Color Inserts](#)

[Copyrights and Credits](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Characters and Story](#)

[PROLOGUE](#)

[DAY 49: MIDNIGHT -- THE WHITE LOSER INN](#)

[DAY 50: MORNING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN](#)

[DAY 50: NIGHT -- INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN](#)

[DAY 50: NIGHT -- OMUI CITY -- INTERLUDE: THE DUKE'S PALACE](#)

[DAY 51: MORNING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN](#)

[DAY 51: MORNING -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: MORNING -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: NOON -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: NOON -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: AFTERNOON -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: AFTERNOON -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: AFTERNOON -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: EVENING -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 51: NIGHT -- THE WHITE LOSER INN -- INTERLUDE: GIRLS' MEETING](#)

[DAY 51: NIGHT -- THE WHITE LOSER INN](#)

[DAY 52: MORNING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN](#)

[DAY 52: MORNING -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 52: LATE MORNING -- A DUNGEON](#)

[DAY 52: LUNCH -- A DUNGEON](#)

DAY 52: AFTERNOON -- A DUNGEON

DAY 52: NIGHT -- A DUNGEON

DAY 52: NIGHT -- THE WHITE LOSER INN -- INTERLUDE: GIRLS' MEETING

DAY 52: NIGHT -- THE WHITE LOSER INN

DAY 52: NIGHT -- INTERLUDE: THE DUKE'S PALACE

DAY 53: MORNING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN

DAY 53: MORNING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN

DAY 53: LATE MORNING -- THE TUNNEL

DAY ?: KINGDOM OF DIORELLE -- INTERLUDE: THE ROYAL CASTLE

DAY 53: LUNCH -- OMUI CITY

DAY 53: MIDDAY -- OMUI CITY

DAY 53: MIDDAY -- INTERLUDE: PICNIC

DAY 54: MORNING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN

DAY 54: LATE MORNING -- A DUNGEON -- 50TH FLOOR

DAY 54: LATE MORNING -- A DUNGEON -- 59TH FLOOR

DAY 54: AFTERNOON --A DUNGEON -- 68TH FLOOR

DAY 54: MORNING -- INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

DAY 54: EVENING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN

DAY 54: EVENING-- INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN -- BACK GARDEN

DAY ?: OMUI -- INTERLUDE: THE DUKE'S PALACE

DAY 55: MORNING -- THE WHITE LOSER INN

DAY 55: MORNING -- INTERLUDE: THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON

DAY 55: EVENING -- THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON EXIT

DAY 55: NIGHT -- THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON FORTRESS

DAY 55: EVENING -- THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON FORTRESS

DAY 55: NIGHT -- THE WHITE LOSER INN

[AFTERWORD](#)

[Newsletter](#)





◆ SHIELD GIRL

◆ CLASS REP

◆ SLIME EMPEROR

◆ ANGELICA

The dungeon king dashed across the field of battle, swinging its sword, parrying with its shield, cloaking itself in Lightning magic, and transforming into a raging inferno. It overwhelmed us with an endless barrage of attacks.

Haruka-kun had
made something truly
terrifying for such
a deity—a fishnet
bodystocking!



LONER LIFE

◆ IN ANOTHER WORLD ◆

Loner Life in Another World (Light Novel) Vol. 4

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Illustrations by Saku Enomaru

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◆ IN ANOTHER WORLD ◆

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OH, PRINCESS!
PERISH IN THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON!

WRITTEN BY



Shoji Goji

ILLUSTRATED BY



Saku Enomaru



*Seven Seas
Entertainment*

CHARACTERS



CLASS REP

Leader of the student council for Haruka's class. Has known Haruka since elementary school.



HARUKA

A high school student summoned to another world. The only member of his class not to receive a cheat skill from God.



ANGELICA

The former emperor of the Ultimate Dungeon. Haruka used "Servitude" on her. Also known as Miss Armor Rep.



VICE REP A

One of Haruka's classmates. A cool beauty prone to glaring at the guys when they do something stupid.



VICE REP B

One of Haruka's classmates. Widely beloved as the most popular girl in the class. Fierce on the battlefield.



VICE REP C

One of Haruka's classmates. A lively ankle-biter who longs to become an adult. She's like a class mascot.



STALKER GIRL

The daughter of the chief of the Shino clan, a family specializing in espionage. A top-notch spy with the skill Perfect Invisibility.

STORY

Haruka, a loner, was summoned to a fantasy world along with the rest of his class. After he enslaved the dungeon emperor Angelica, she joined him in exploring the various dungeons of the region. He spent his days improving their home base, Omui, with treasures acquired from the dungeons.

Then, the corrupt Lord of Nallogi sent the Stalker Girl to spy on Haruka. But rather than seeing her as an enemy, Haruka treated her with kindness. His only goal was to bring happiness to as many people as he could—and, inspired by his words, the Stalker Girl betrayed Nallogi. Enraged, Lord Nallogi was about to execute the Stalker Girl when Haruka appeared at the last second, using teleportation magic to rescue her. To protect Omui from both Nallogi and the rest of the kingdom, Haruka converted the only road between Nallogi and Omui into a pseudo-dungeon.

PROLOGUE



FROM WHAT I RECALLED, it had been a long night. Wait, it was still night right now, and I was pulling an all-nighter. The story of how I got here was even longer—Stalker Girl fussing over a pimple, and the orc lord—this fantasy world was a strange place.

The story was only as long as the road we traversed. I supposed that since time immemorial people had always regarded annoying problems as something that someone else would deal with, but that orc lord was especially annoying.

“If they get this far, we may as well send them over the edge?”

“Waste their energy. They come here...send them down,” Miss Armor Rep haltingly suggested.

Roads brought riches and knowledge, but also disaster. That’s why people had always prayed to the God of the Cardinal Directions, told fortunes, and went far out of their way to avoid traveling unlucky paths. *I say we add another pitfall.*

“What if we subtly increase the slope of this hallway to send them tumbling over the embankment? Y’know, like this?”

“Then you need...bigger gap.”

That was why people built roads, and that was why they feared them.

A road could change someone’s destiny—even change the course of civilizations.

“We can take inspiration from the Setsubun custom of throwing beans to repel evil on the last day of winter,” I said. “Pelt them with rocks and send them scurrying right into a pit.”

I didn’t know yet what this road would bring, but at the very least, it would bring the future...if the future could somehow manage to pass through here safely.

DAY 49

MIDNIGHT

Freelancing in my own sweatshop is self-abuse!

THE WHITE LOSER INN

STALKER GIRL AND THE POSTER GIRL fell asleep while hugging and crying, but I was still working on my side hustle.

No one could deny that I was the hardest working NEET the world had ever seen!

At the moment, I was reinforcing Shield Girl's armor with mithril. Instead of going on fantastic adventures in this swords-and-sorcery world, I'm stuck upgrading equipment for my entire class.

"What the hell is a 'battle dress?!'"

Oh, this was the Tiny Animal's request, so there was no reason to even consider it. She was too minuscule for anything to look alluring on her—besides, was it really a good idea to leave so much skin exposed in battle? Did she not care at all about defense? Request denied.

Otherwise, I worked on my spellstone batteries, making both rechargeable and non-rechargeable variants.

"Eureka! A new product! This'll be a bestseller, no doubt!"

These beauties were designed to store extra reserves of magic power. They would be perfect for the rearguard—as they were all magic users, they were the ideal demographic for spellstone batteries.

"They'll eat it up!" I whispered to myself.

Because my classmates ran out of MP so quickly, they couldn't make good progress in any of the various dungeons. With the extra power, they would be able to fight longer. They needed this equipment as soon as possible.

When I showed the batteries to my classmates, they all said, “So that’s why you never ran out of MP!”

Batteries were simple in principle. According to *How to Magic Item!*, I just needed to arrange a group of spellstones in a circuit in order to let magic power flow through them. By fusing such a circuit together, I could make a portable spellstone battery. Since the people in this world had never heard of batteries or electrical circuits, the theory was never put into practice.

In short, spellstone batteries acted as MP reservoirs. Not only were they a countermeasure for running out of MP in the middle of battle, they would also allow a magic user to cast more expensive spells, too. Everyone would want them. Everyone would need them. And the profits would be all mine!

“Normally, no one could test the theory out, right?” I muttered to myself. “After all, who in this world would have a massive collection of each individual class of spellstone?”

Me, obviously. The monsters on each floor of a dungeon yielded spellstones of the same level, so when I cleared a floor, I collected them all. I had more than enough material for experiments. The only difficulty I ran into was that the effects depended on the type of spellstones used and what kind of circuits I made with them. In the end, I had to iterate through every possible combination. I couldn’t move on to mass production before I understood the principles of spellstone circuitry.

“I wonder if a sequel to *How to Magic Item!* ever came out. It probably also got banned for having a nonsense name like *Know How Magic Items!* Nonetheless, this has to be the first of a series written by an ancient scholar, right?”

For now, I would make enough batteries for everyone. It turned out that I didn’t need to make one for myself, because my item bag had accidentally become an extremely powerful MP battery. Since I carried so many top-tier spellstones in there, they naturally formed circuits and provided me with a torrent of free MP.

“Come to think of it, it was pretty weird that I never seemed to run out of MP. Turns out, I was leeching off my own spellstones the whole time. That probably

explains why my MP Regeneration leveled up so fast, too.”

Whenever I ran out of MP, my item bag battery filled me back up. I finally understood why MP Regeneration evolved into MP Absorption. I would’ve never known had I not read *How to Magic Item!* Reading really was fundamental.

Since I now had MP Absorption, I suspected that I absorbed ambient magic power from my surroundings and channeled it back into the spellstone battery. After all, I renovated an entire mountain range without running out. That should’ve required a staggering amount of MP, yet I didn’t notice at all. It worked without a hitch.

There I was, grinding away at my side gig in the small hours of the night. Miss Armor Rep was totally zonked out. Her long legs stuck out from under the blanket, their divine beauty drawing my gaze to her alluring, flawless thighs. *It’s a trap! Without a doubt, a trap!* I had fallen for it so many times, and every single time, I got no sleep and a bucketload of scolding!

“Hmm, I want to start manufacturing sauce in my cave, but I haven’t even gotten around to establishing a poultry plan, and I haven’t done anything with the garden since I cleared it out. Besides, I really want to have hot tub fun times. Despite owning my own home, I don’t have the time to be a proper shut-in!”

I’m supposed to be a Shut-In, a NEET, and a Loner, damn it!

“First things first, I have to sort out this chicken-and-egg situation. They’re essential ingredients for omurice and oyakodon! I’m also desperate for some seaweed and dried bonito flakes! There’s literally no seafood around here, y’know? Where’s the sea?!” I muttered to myself.

I doubted I could reach the sea any time soon, but corn would do the trick! *Perfect! Omurice goes great with corn soup, doesn’t it?* That meant I needed to source some corn. At least I already had onions and scallions. *What else do I need...butter? Oh, and cheese!* This was an emergency—the agricultural sector needed to innovate! I wasn’t even a citizen, so why did I have to implement agricultural reforms? How was that a side job in any way?!

Grumbling, I went back to the nightly grind.

Did Loner, Shut-In, and NEET make it easy for me to pull all-nighters? Though I still wanted to sleep. This was like freelancing in a sweatshop.

During our meeting today, I understood what each group struggled with, so I wanted to make equipment to mitigate their issues. Besides, I could charge outrageous prices! *I'm gonna be rich! Sleepy, but rich!*

“Those damn nerds will have to pay an extra special nerd tax, too. They’re snoozing so contentedly right now and it’s pissing me off. I’ll rip them off like crazy!”

As a start, I made sixty disposable magic batteries, plus ninety rechargeable ones especially for the rearguard. I’d be back to millionaire status by tomorrow morning!

There was still one huge problem: the girls were all bankrupt from their recent clothes shopping spree. I even had to lend them money to buy rings yesterday! Ooh! If I made a spellstone battery that looked like a bracelet, it would sell like hotcakes! It would look like prayer beads, but if each bracelet used a variety of spellstone colors, it should still be a hit. *Heh heh heh, I’ll plunge the girls ever deeper into debt! They deserve a taste of the poverty that I have suffered!*

Despite the girls all being flat broke, I still ended up agreeing to make a bunch of bespoke clothing for them. None of their orders specified sizes, only colors and designs. Was I supposed to measure them myself? They didn’t even make patterns for me to use!

“Are they really making a teenage boy in excellent health measure teenage girls? Really? If that’s the case, I’m looking forward to working on Vice Rep A’s order—a long, tight leather skirt with a revealing slit. That sounds so good that I wanna go measure her right away. I’ll make one for Miss Armor Rep, too! She’ll try it on, and I’ll take it right off. Yes, wear it for the sole purpose of taking it off! Not that she wouldn’t look amazing keeping it on, too.”

Speaking of which, both Miss Armor Rep’s and my equipment should get mithril upgrades, too.

“They’re all already cheat items, so I’m not sure if they can get any more OP,” I said. “It’s probably fine to leave them for later. Although Miss Armor Rep’s

Cloak of Holding is pretty shoddy, so I should at least upgrade that, right?”

At that point, I’d seriously need to take all my equipment out and strengthen it.

“I’d have to unsocket all of my equipment to upgrade it? Let’s see, for my weapon, I fused the Void Staff, the Mana Cutter, the Grass-Cutting Sword—which, as a legendary, divine weapon, shouldn’t need upgrades—and the Elder Ent Staff. My cloak is slotted with the Invisibility Cloak, the Mirror Cloak, and the Evasion Cloak. My boots contain Speed Bonus Boots, Resistance Greaves, and Adhesive Boots. My gloves: the Spearshield Gauntlets and Magician’s Glove. Finally, my ring: Trap Ring, Demon Ring, Fairy Ring, the Ring of the Golem Crafter, and the redundant Ring of the Dungeon Master. I slotted the Adamantine Covering into my clothes—that might be worth buffing. The Black Hat, too...”

How the hell could I do all of that in a single night?! *What happened to labor regulations?!*

“How did I manage to exploit my own labor?! This is a criminal amount of unpaid overtime! I’ve somehow turned a hobby into a sweatshop! I don’t even get how I managed to exploit myself! Can I blame anyone except myself?”

I also had a ton of orders from the general store. *I need to get the town to handle its own development or I’ll end up running the entire economy as a part-time job!*

So sleepy... The bare-naked battle had gone on for so long that I couldn’t even maintain my woodpecker mode. The eternal dungeon empress now lay in bed, a beatific smile on her sleeping face. She was drooling just a little bit, but she was still somehow adorable.

Without these jobs, I would be broke, but I really had my work cut out for me. At the city’s present level of economic development, exploitation was certainly inevitable. When was this going to end?

And the whole damn time, those plump, exposed thighs were tempting me to come back to bed.

“What’s urgent about this order?! That general store lady says everything is

urgent! How is mushroom fried rice for three urgent?! Make your own damn dinner! I'm not a restaurant! And I still have to go to the dungeon in the morning...but at least she's making it worth my while! I can charge what I want!"

I sent raw materials dancing through the air, an arcane assembly line of manufacturing ending in my storage section. There was no end in sight, not even close—my stack of remaining invoices had barely shrunk. They were so numerous that they spiraled through the roof, a drill that pierced the heavens! I felt like my sense of reason was kicked to the curb as I tried to do the impossible.

"I can't—I just can't do it anymore! I'm done! Yep, it's time for round three!"

To bed! Activate woodpecker mode!

The events of the third round are too lurid to display.

DAY 50

MORNING

I thought they were my old classmates, but nah, those are definitely different people.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

THE EARLY BIRD sets up a worm market and grows rich off those lazy doing nothing birds. In other words, I woke up early to set up my market stall.

“Today’s featured product!” I hawked. “MP batteries and charged bracelets for sale! Presenting just sixty of these rare, premium edition goods! Hurry up and buy them! You wanna buy them, right?”

As soon as I finished speaking, I was presented with a tableau depicting the glorious, hellish battle of frenzied bargain-hunting Valkyries, their boundless fury enough to destroy a thousand dungeons.

Normally, the girls who fought on the front line shoved the spellcasters out of the way, but today was different. These were spellstone bracelets with mysterious effects! Made with real spellstones!

I had two types for sale. One was a high-capacity power stone bracelet, made by connecting several large spellstones. It provided instantaneous power in an emergency, ideal for the front-line fighters.

However, I personally recommended the narrow wrap bracelet. It could efficiently provide a steady supply of MP over a long period of time. I totally plagiarized the design, but I doubted that anyone in this world would notice. If the original designer found out, I’d simply apologize. Besides, the representatives of the Shinto-Muso Cane Style in this world had yet to send any complaints. Since I sealed off the frontier with a pseudo-dungeon, I should be fine. It’s not like any jewelry brands were about to open a branch in this town, after all.

“O—M—G!”

“You can’t have that, that one’s mine!”

“No, I want it! That bracelet chose me. Oh, this one too, we were meant for each other!”

“These are for spellcasters, you don’t need it!”

“Yeah, it’s not fair! Magic users deserve to upgrade their firepower, too!”

The girls, now in peak bargain frenzy, pushed and shoved each other out of the way. There was hair pulling and clothes tearing—this was a public safety hazard... *Keep me out of this! I had nothing to do with it!*

“The vanguard needs MP, too!”

“This is the only one of this design! I need it—it’s mine!”

“I saw it first! It’s a designer knock-off, but still!”

“These shouldn’t be limited edition, they’re too good! I only ended up with two!”

“Yeah, make more already!”

“And more rings too!”

I’m rich! The millionaire, reborn! So why did I still have to work?

“Even if each of you bought two bracelets there should still be some left,” I said. “How many arms do you have, anyway?”

“Two bracelets are not enough for a fashionable young woman!”

“You’re wearing rings on every finger and bracelets up to your elbows. Are you trying to forge a jewelry gauntlet?!”

All the extra rings sold out, too! Now I wouldn’t need to worry about them dealing with status ailments or something, though it was certainly too late to worry about my production estimates.

“Haruka-kun, do they come in purple? If you have a wrap bracelet with purple and red stones, give it to me!”

“We’ll take it if you have one, and if you don’t, make it! Is that so hard?!”

Isn't it a bit presumptuous to demand so much without any money? All the girls were buying on credit. On top of that, these were limited-edition goods! They behaved as if it was a buyer's market regardless. Could this be...could this be due to my lack of sex appeal?!

It seemed that my absence of charisma was so dire that it broke the laws of economics. How else to explain her furious demands? Was the purple, red, and blue bracelet not to your liking? *Have you no sympathy for the poor color blue?* I thought. *Have you no sympathy for me? I'm not kidding.*

Even after I sold out, I got twenty more custom orders. I was a millionaire among millionaires, but I had a brutal schedule set out for tonight.

"These numbers don't make sense. The nerds and the meatheads didn't even get any! Well, that's because they're pinned to the wall on fire... Oh well. And I made and sold fifty extra status ailment-resistant bracelets that you guys requested; just how many does one person need? Just how much do you intend on getting attacked by ailments?"

Technically, I had profited, but my pockets were still empty. Production didn't cost anything, so I didn't mind letting them pay with credit, but that still meant I had no cash on hand. In that case, time to do some dungeoneering!

Why do I feel like dungeons are the only place I can go to relax? What's that about?

Even so, the architecture and decorating standards of dungeons were appalling. My next destination would be the worst dungeon yet. It was crawling with bug-type monsters!

I stopped by the general store to make a delivery. After handing over three bowls of mushroom fried rice, I whacked the general store lady with a folding paper fan. I was overwhelmed with work, so after making her dinner, I'd made the paper fan so I could communicate my irritation through slapstick. After we concluded our business, I headed over to the dungeon.

Woe is me! My enemies are pests and so are my allies! Let's just exterminate the bugs and get this over with. Miss Armor Rep was with another group, so I got stuck babysitting these dumbass meatheads.

“Okay, we got stuck with this dungeon because none of the girls want to go toe-to-tarsus with a bunch of bugs,” I said. “But only a real moron would waste their time chasing after bugs and smashing them one-by-one, y’know? They’ve got wings—they’ll obviously fly away!”

“Bro, what else can we do?”

“It totally works, dude! We just chase them when they flee,” Kakizaki-kun said.

This group had extra sets of biceps where their brains should’ve been. They only knew how to run up to a monster and hit it until it stopped moving—no ranged attacks or special abilities. They were well-suited to fighting huge beasts, but insects could easily dodge their attacks. This was their worst possible matchup, so they barely made any progress in this dungeon. Since they never learned from their mistakes, they wasted days just chasing after bugs. They were outsmarted by a swarm of insects!

We started on the 39th floor, facing level 39 paralyze moths. All morning, I sold rings that countered their special attacks. Yet, apparently, they couldn’t take them down because the moths just avoided their attacks. They had actually been preparing to go back to try again with their usual swords and spears!

“Even a little kid would try to make a butterfly net or something. Why are you trying to stab mosquitos with swords? How does it feel to get outwitted by a moth? Do you know what tools are? Have you ever considered learning to do magic?”

“Whoa, we never thought of that!” the meatheads said.

How stupid can you be?!

“How did none of you think of using a net to catch bugs?! Are any of you even equipped with a brain?!”

“But ain’t it just faster to stab ’em?”

“You’ve wasted entire days just chasing moths!” I cried.

Back at the general store, the owner had recommended some suspicious herbs. She assured me that burning them would take care of bugs, no problem. I had bought out her entire stock.

As soon as I started fumigating, the paralyze moths dropped like, well, moths around us. I couldn’t believe that an ordinary insecticide was killing level 39 dungeon moths! That meant they were just regular old insects, right? *Does this mean we can clear this dungeon in a day with some casual fumigation?*

“Badass, dude! I never would’ve come up with that on my own!”

Please get me out of here.

“Have you never seen an exterminator before?” I asked. “Did you just ignore me when I explained the plan earlier? Why would someone from the 21st century try to kill bugs with a sword? I’m the one who should be surprised! Even cavemen could deal with bugs better than you! Just how far backwards did you evolve?”

The meatheads made no sense. They showed no signs of intelligent life. What were they? Were they really sentient? Maybe I should try scorching them to find out.

“Aw man, I feel like such a dope! Until now, my best strat was running thirty feet up a wall to slice a moth in half with my flaming sword.”

“Yeah, and I just used countless high-speed slashes to prevent swarms of flies from escaping!”

“Bro, remember when we fought those giant beetles? We just staggered them with attacks until their armor broke. Can’t believe we did things like that when we could’ve used bug spray!”

Huh. They were kind of convincing me—that sounded a lot more like action scenes in a fantasy world. Was that really the right way to do things? *No, they just made it sound awesome!*

In other words, the meatheads chased moths until they were cornered near a wall, swung their swords senselessly when engulfed by swarms of flies, and

battered against the hard shells of beetles until they won those battles of attrition. They thought like total barbarians. Rather, they didn't think at all!

Phew, they almost tricked me by sounding cool. *The power of words is frightening.*

"Did you guys really come from the modern world? I was pretty sure we were classmates, but maybe you're just strangers."

"Don't be like that, bro! We were in the same class! You know us!"

I couldn't believe we came from the same era. If anyone else from the modern world heard this conversation, the sheer idiocy would surely make them weep. And the fact that I was the same species as them... Well, this was just depressing.

While making the idiots feel like idiots, I continued to burn the insecticide herbs and used Wind magic to disperse the smoke.

"On to the next floor," I said. "If they're still alive, I can fumigate more, and if that's not enough, we can just flood the dungeon and let them drown. Let's consider our options after we see what's ahead."

"Bruh, what were we even thinking before, trying to take out the bugs by fighting?"

"Right? I can't believe I almost died crossing blades with that giant praying mantis."

"Don't forget the swarm of locusts, dude! We barely survived that."

"Oh man, and those caterpillars with the venomous spit were the worst! We had to run all over the damn dungeon to survive!"

"Who knew that burning a few herbs could save us from fighting?!"

I felt an inexplicable twinge of regret for changing their strategy. It was hard to believe they used to be citizens of the modern world. At least they weren't like the nerds, the worst byproducts of modern civilization.

"Would any modern person really use swords to fight insects?" I asked. "Seriously! I'm pretty sure that insecticides were used in the medieval period. Hell, they even used quicklime all the way back in antiquity! I'm pretty sure

folks have been using the pyrethrum daisy since the dawn of civilization. What era did you guys get summoned from, the Jurassic?"

Am I the only normal person around? That's awful.

DAY 50

NIGHT

I run a literal clothing line, so I am 100% innocent for being concerned about the ups and downs of the textile industry.

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

THE DUNGEON BOSS presumably dropped Insect Shell Armor. *Presumably*, because that was what Haruka-kun found lying on the floor beside the spellstone after fumigating the dungeon.

“Dude, I didn’t expect insecticide to be super effective!”

“Yeah, man. Damn shame it’s expensive, though.”

Haruka-kun kept bickering with Kakizaki-kun’s group over who would take the creepy bug armor. They all tried to fob the armor off on each other. *I don’t blame them. It’s gross!*

Haruka-kun chased Kakizaki-kun around the room, trying to force the armor onto him. Meanwhile, all the girls kept their distance. Everything they brought from that dungeon was equally revolting.

“Everything was seriously made of bug parts?” I asked.

“Check out this spear! Isn’t it sick?” Kakizaki-kun said.

We practically leapt out of our skins. The spear was literally a huge insect leg. *Can you not take that out at the dinner table?*

The guys proceeded to report their findings.

“The insecticide exterminated everything except for the worms, so it’s unclear what the dungeon king even was.”

“Despite the bug theme, we found some nasty weapons from the 46th floor onward.”

“Yeah, the place was covered in these frickin’ huge spiderwebs, so maybe there were spider monsters there.”

Haruka-kun interrupted, “What a rip-off! Who decided to put earthworms into a bug dungeon? Oh, but that insecticide worked like a charm, y’know? Supposedly, it can wipe out everything but roaches! Though if I saw any giant roaches, I’d run for the hills, y’know?”

He did it again: he killed the dungeon boss without bothering to see what it was first. He didn’t even know what type of monster it was, adding yet another entry to our list of unsolved mysteries. Last time, he drowned a dungeon, and this time he poisoned a dungeon. *Come to think of it, he seduced the boss of the Ultimate Dungeon!*

The nerds crowded in on Kakizaki-kun’s group with panicked expressions. Their faces were deadly serious.

“You said there were weapons dropped on the 46th floor, but did you find anything else? Was that it?” Oda-kun asked.

“Yeah! Did you find anything to protect the, er, chest?” Nerd B added, blushing.

Another nerd asked, “And you found no armor for below the waist, right?”

“What? What’s the big deal?” Kakizaki-kun asked, perplexed.

“You’re sure that you didn’t find any sort of leather...bikini?” Oda-kun tried to whisper.

The eyes of the nerds widened, full of dismay. They knew more than any of us about fantasy worlds, so if something produced such an effect on them, it had to be serious. All four verged on hyperventilation.

“What kind of weapons did you find?”

“The usual: swords, spears, and shields. What’s your problem, bruh?”

Oda-kun cast his eyes down, his shoulders tense and shivering.

“They could’ve been arachne demons, but you massacred them without bothering to find out!”

The nerds started wailing and gnashing their teeth. *What's special about arachne demons? Are they friendly monsters?* Even Haruka-kun stood with his mouth agape, realization dawning.

“Arachne demons...do you mean what I think you mean?”

“W-we didn’t find any armor, bro, nothing!” Kakizaki-kun stammered.

The nerds turned on Haruka-kun, their eyes fiery. “You! What color is your blood?!”

“H-hold on, why would there be arachne demons in a bug dungeon? They’re not insects, r-right? Ah! They didn’t drop armor! They had no armor—just a bikini! Nooo!”

The boys couldn’t contain their anguish. What was happening? It looked like Angelica knew what was going on; she was giving them a flat look. I should ask her.

“Half-lady, half-spider?”

“So, spiders from the waist down and women from the waist up, right? And no armor is important because—oh.”

Verdict: guilty on all counts.

(INTERMISSION—LECTURE IN PROGRESS)

“Gross! You’re seriously thirsty for naked bugs?!”

Arachne demons dropped weapons but no armor, meaning they were most likely naked, and only wore a leather bikini at best. Whatever the case, they were obsessing over a sexy monster girl.

“Ugh, *guys*,” we groaned in unison.

Haruka-kun alone refused to admit his guilt. He claimed that in Greek myths, Arachne was the only weaver to surpass the goddess Athena.

“Listen,” he continued. “I have so many custom orders from you! I need help! It’s so much work! Since arachne demons must be renowned weavers, they could’ve made everything, even the raw materials!”

I leapt to my feet. “For real?”

“For real for real, an arachne demon spins her own thread, so she can make everything from scratch. Besides, with eight limbs, she’ll never have her hands full! Think of the possibilities! If I had an arachne servant, I could mass-produce clothes! No longer would I have to suffer the long hours hunched over my sewing table. No longer would my eyes blur as I push myself to the brink of exhaustion. I could end the waking nightmare of sweatshop labor! Not only that, but we could have had cheaper clothes in many more styles. Do you not see that I am blameless in all this?!”

Without warning, the girls (myself included) began to tremble, as if the agitation and lament were about to overflow from our hearts. We could not lecture him any longer. Our great hope for cheap fashion in a multitude of styles perished. There were no flaws in his argument. Exploiting our weakness, he rendered all of our counterarguments moot. His defense was impregnable.

Although, he *did* shout, “No armor!” along with the other nerds. Surely whether they wore armor or not had no bearing on their ability to produce a clothing line. This was damning evidence. Beyond any reasonable doubt, he wanted to peep on naked monster girls. Verdict: definitely guilty!

(THE LECTURE HAS RESUMED. PLEASE WAIT A LITTLE LONGER.)

Moving past the lecture, our meeting went well. Two of the groups reached the 49th floor, but returned because they didn’t want to risk losing to the dungeon boss. Thus, we decided to all raid one of the bosses together. On top of that, Haruka-kun had to go find all the secret treasures, so tomorrow would be a busy day for all of us. Especially for Haruka-kun.

Even though Haruka-kun never reported to the duke, to the point that he bribed Stalker Girl with some candy to report in his stead, his schedule was still packed.

Haruka-kun probably needed help with item production, but he was the only one of us with any practical skill in alchemy. We couldn’t help him at all, since we all had crafting skill penalties. Haruka-kun also seemed to be the best tailor around, but we couldn’t help either. Even if some of us could sew by hand, none of us could use magic to sew or help him mass-produce anything.

We couldn't find and process ingredients for food, either. Only Haruka-kun could do that. Even those of us who knew how to cook without magic didn't know obscure recipes like how to make ketchup. Not that any of us could cook *with* magic, either. *Isn't magic supposed to be for combat?*

"I've lost all my pride as a woman..."

"I was even a member of the school cooking club..."

"I don't understand how he uses magic to cook!"

"It's not like we can recognize the ingredients, either! On top of that, having to cook without access to spices or sauces is way too hard."

No matter how basic the craft, Haruka-kun just kinda...took to it. Not only that, but he was getting commissioned for serious construction projects. Even the sorcerers who could use elemental magic didn't know the first thing about architecture. None of us could even read blueprints, so we were useless. My skills could destroy, but they couldn't create.

Not to mention all his freelance work, consulting with local businesses, financing them, advising them on merchandise, producing and selling his own merch and so on. How was he still alive?

To put it mildly, Haruka-kun was pretty busy. Even if crafting was his true specialty, not combat, he still demolished dungeons faster than anyone. No one else could conquer a dungeon with fumigation, flooding, or dissolving the metal!

And that wasn't his only advantage in combat, since he had a true combat legend, Angelica, as his servant. Right now, she was sulking a bit because she wanted to stay in the same group as Haruka-kun. *She's so cute!*

Haruka-kun destroyed dungeons by day and fueled the whole town's economy with his crafting skills by night. I couldn't believe that he could maintain this pace every single day.

"He makes all of our equipment, too."

"Yeah, and he added buffs to all of our accessories and clothing."

"Right? Not to mention all the dungeon loot he sells at affordable prices. He's

doing everything by himself.”

“Affordable, my ass!” Shimazaki-san said.

“If he sold everything at market rates, we couldn’t afford anything.”

“Yeah, instead he figured out exactly how much we could afford and took every last ele!”

Even though he drained our wallets without mercy, I was still grateful to him. Even though he talked me into spending all my wealth, he still went bankrupt the second I turned my back!

Despite my criticisms, I was truly happy. Even when I tried to thank him, I ended up scolding him anyway. *But stop fantasizing about arachne demons!*

Even Angelica was disturbed, and the mean girls looked ready to bite his head off. It looked like a storm was brewing between slaves and masters.

Even if he had ended up enslaving them, at least he made sure they had the clothes they wanted! *Ugggh, the missed opportunity of cheap clothes in a ton of styles!*

DAY 50

NIGHT

It'll be no problem if you simply adjust the shipping strategy to match the town planning and waterway management.

OMUI CITY

INTERLUDE: THE DUKE'S PALACE

“TO CONCLUDE MY REPORT, here are Haruka’s proposals. This one is about trade, finance, and economics. Below that is a strategy for agricultural reforms. The documents on the floor focus on regional development plans—the proposal for urban renewal is at the very bottom of the pile.”



The girl thanked me for my time and left the room. I was surrounded by teetering stacks of plans, with even more proposals surrounding them.

A brief glance was enough to know that all these proposals were revolutionary. I looked at the defense plans first; they were completely without precedent.

It proposed turning the mountains that surrounded Omui into fortress walls and establishing a fortified city that could direct the economy of the entire duchy.

He had already completed this first step, placing a pseudo-dungeon as the gatehouse to the duchy. He wanted to place one castle town at the entrance to manage trade and defense, and another in the south to address the looming threat of monsters. In the east and west, the proposal detailed plans for agricultural zones, with New Omui lying in the center. With Omui's army garrisoned at each corner of the central metropolis, we would be able to quickly address problems in all directions. Finally, there was even a detailed plan for maintaining the public roads.

"This..." I began.

"This is outrageous, yet..." muttered an administrator.

I only wanted to discuss the events in Nallogi, but instead I was handed a radical development plan for the entire duchy. The very idea that an entire realm could be turned into a massive fortress was a stroke of genius, and he had already completed the construction of the walls on our border with the kingdom.

"He even produced map drafts and a schedule!"

"How did he make such a detailed map?!"

There was even a budget attached with a cost-benefit analysis, and the public works projects were surprisingly affordable. On top of that, there was still room for further negotiations.

Civil servants from every department fought over the proposals and read excerpts aloud with giddy abandon. Fires kindled in their souls as they regarded

the possibilities.

“We should implement this one next!”

“No, this proposal is far more important!”

They read and reread the proposals as if they were possessed, confirming plans and details with one another. There was no hiding their newfound excitement.

I must be dreaming, I thought. A dream of a peaceful and prosperous realm. None dared imagine that such a dream would be realized on the frontier.

He had provided us with instructions to usher in a golden age for our humble city. I was almost afraid to believe it was possible.

Despite my skepticism and my careful scrutiny, I could not deny the evidence before my eyes. These proposals formed a blueprint for a future utopia.

Our tears washed over the piles of reports. The proposals read like a map to a land of dreams. These stoic bureaucrats broke into raucous laughter as they imagined a bright, shining future for their children and their children’s children.

Indeed, the content of these reports was pure dream stuff, and to read them was to enter a waking fantasy. Yet those same pages outlined how we could capture those idylls and make them real. They blazed a path toward an impossible future. We brimmed and overflowed with hope that turned to joyous tears, for the future would become a paradise.

Indeed, these were not mere flights of fancy; the proposals told us what we needed to do to obliterate all obstacles to utopia and make it a reality, even by force. Yes, this wasn’t aspirational, this was a strategy to overcome any obstacle. His plans refused to recognize any possibility other than a blissful dream.

“Dear friends,” I said, “if there are any among you who believe these plans impossible after having seen so much, step forward now and make yourself known!”

None of my attendants moved as they stared at me, tears running down their cheeks. *Yes, exactly as I hoped!*

They wore their conviction on their faces. This was a task worth any risk; there could be no higher purpose than enacting these plans.

“Then we must begin! Do what can be done and send regular reports of your progress and any issues you face. If you need anything, whether goods or people, you need but ask.”

The civil servants and administrators chorused, “Yes, my lord!”

They returned to their posts—their faces as resolute as if they marched to war. No, for civil servants, this *was* war.

Until now, these brave officials could only try to pick up the pieces between losing battles. This was their first real chance for victory.

Even the generals in the military were impressed by the defense proposal, the incorporated strategies, and the novel tactics.

I riffled through another proposal. How could one person have so much intelligence, knowledge, and craft?

What in the world was that boy?

Who were those youths?

Were they just a collective dream, a hallucination haunting our desolate realm?

Frontier folk did not believe in gods. How could we? So, why did those youths come to this blighted, hopeless duchy? Why did they do so much for us, knowing that we couldn’t hope to repay them?

Before their arrival, the people of the frontier only knew doom.

The mysterious youths spread happiness and destroyed monsters wherever they went.

They never said where they came from or why they came. I didn’t even know what their goals were. After all, I never understood a word that came out of that boy’s mouth.

Nonetheless, those youths with black hair and black eyes spread joy to the frontier.

Worship would be insufficient repayment for the blessings they brought. Yet though they blessed us anew every day, I could do little more than express my thanks. The lad at the center of their group spread bliss to every corner of this region without ever remembering its name. *Why won't he remember the name of my realm? We put up signs everywhere!*

Even these fantastical blueprints for our future referred to the town as “Whatever-burg” or “Somewheres-ville”

It's named Omui, Haruka! Omui!

DAY 51

MORNING

It's not time to panic yet, but there's no time to nap, either.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

“TODAY, WE'RE SPLITTING ourselves up into boss-fight groups and regular dungeon exploration groups. Remember which group you're in! Especially you, Haruka-kun, you're obviously asleep! It's bad enough that you never listen while you're awake, but now you're just sleeping through meetings! Hey! Wake up!”

How rude, I was totally listening! The plan was to clear the 50th floor of three dungeons all in one day. See, I heard everything. I was just resting my eyes while also unconscious. But totally not asleep, y'know? Zzzzz.

I was even using Blockhead to puppet my unconscious body so I can stay on my feet, so no issues there. I was just... Zzzz, y'know? Zzzzzzz.

“Everything about this is wrong!”

“I've never heard any sleeping person say Zzzzzz before!”

“Wake up, damn it, we've gotta get started!”

“Angelica, what do you do to wake him up in the morning?”

She told them.

“What?! N-n-no, he wakes up with a kiss? Why does it have to be that? You can't expect me to do that! Why are you all staring at me? I refuse! No way, not in a million years, not when everyone's looking! That doesn't mean you should all look away! Do you really think I would do that? There's n-no way! Please, just wake up, Haruka-kun!”

With focus, I could block out all external stimuli. Right when it started to feel like I could think again, I woke up. The morning sun shone through the window,

and Class Rep's blushing face shone nearly as bright.

"What's all the hubbub? I'm trying to catch some shut eye, y'know? Sleep lost means youth lost, know what I'm saying? I don't want to face that fate! Why is your face so close?"

"My face isn't close—your face is close! Why is everyone looking at us like that? Wake up, you've slept way too much! Why did the morning have to be like this? *Wah!*"

Without warning, the Class Rep burst into tears. What did I miss? Tears were running down her blushing cheeks.

"Aw, it's okay, did you get an upset stomach because you couldn't sleep? There, there. Are you hungry? You already had your breakfast, didn't you? Speaking of which, I need breakfast!"



“Why would I get an upset stomach from staying up all night? Besides, you just ate breakfast! Don’t be an idiot, Haruka-kun. How could you forget something so recent?”

How lively. Will I never have a peaceful morning?

“Aw, she chickened out!”

“You traitors! Why didn’t any of you help me? Why did you all just look the other way? You’re expecting me to kiss him?! That’s too embarrassing, I couldn’t!”

Hello? What about breakfast? Even though we were in the dining hall, there was no food in sight. I didn’t need to go on a diet. Indeed, I couldn’t function without those precious breakfast nutrients.

I closed my eyes for a moment, and when I next opened them, I found myself in a dungeon.

“Another unfamiliar dungeon. What? Why did I wake up in a dungeon? Where are we?”

“Oh, how wonderful that you’ve decided to open your eyes. Sleepwalking all the way here was an impressive trick. Nothing could wake you, not even touching you,” Vice Rep B said, smiling and bouncing—not like that, I meant bouncing on her feet! *Get your mind out of the gutter!*

“Huh? Sleepwalking? What do you mean, ‘touching?’ Who felt me up? Why won’t any of you look me in the eyes? What happened?!”

There was something fishy going on—could it be...sexual harassment?! *Who is the culprit? Where did their touchy hands wander?*

“Anyway, uh, since we’re here, let’s go conquer this dungeon!” I declared, whipping out my stick.

“Wow, nice stick.”

Why did they sound so sarcastic? My suspicions were only deepening. Soon, my suspicions would go deeper than this dungeon.

“There’s a secret room on this floor,” I said. “Which floor are we on, anyway?”

One of the mean girls answered, “The first. We, like, just got here. There’s a secret room so soon? Weren’t those supposed to be in a deeper, danker part of a dungeon, or whatever?”

This was my first time encountering a secret room before the 20th floor. Could there really be one here? There was something strange about it. *It’s such an odd spot, but I’m certain it’s there.*

I pushed on the wall of the dungeon’s entrance.

“What?! A secret room right at the start?” Vice Rep A sputtered.

With a cascade of dust, the false wall slid open, revealing a small chamber. Instead of a treasure chest, the room contained...a book. Was this the fantasy world equivalent of finding a porn mag stashed by a riverbank or hidden in some bushes at the park? Was this the real purpose of dungeons? *I’m excited, this world is full of hot girls!*

“Know How Magic Items!”—hang on, it really exists? Did my midnight ramblings trigger an event flag?!”

So, begging for this plot development was enough to trigger it! But someone owes my teenage horniness an apology.

I was glad that the book actually existed, but why was it hidden? Perhaps it was secreted away in a dungeon because it was banned. Because the text was so useful to the region, it was hidden rather than burned. Whatever the case, I could only speculate. Judging by the layer of dust, it had been lying untouched for a very long time.

Leafing through it, *Know How Magic Items!* was indeed a sequel to *How to Magic Item!* *How many crimes against grammar will be in the title of the next volume? How many more volumes will I find?* This volume detailed more sophisticated magic item creation methods and expounded on the theory behind magic and skills.

Besides the title, it was a pretty dense text. Reading between the lines, I felt the author’s desire to give people the knowledge they needed to live in safety and comfort. The banning of this book was an incalculable loss to the world.

This book would've made the lives of so many safer and easier—not just soldiers and adventurers, but farmers and merchants, too. Banning this text should have been unthinkable. *If I just change the title, is that enough to get it unbanned?*

After a brief discussion, Class Rep said to me, “We’ve decided that you should have the book, Haruka-kun. It’s perfect for you.”

I stashed the book in my bag. *Excellent*, I thought. Now I had to find all the other secret rooms so that we could all grab our own little prize. *It’s a treasure hunt!*

The monsters on the upper floors were slaughtered before I could face them myself, leaving behind nothing but spellstones. Miss Armor Rep was feeling herself today; she was in the middle of a whirlwind murder spree. I knew what was happening! I wouldn’t have anything to do this time, either. Exploring a new dungeon by doing nothing but walking down some stairs should’ve been a rare experience, but at this point, it was routine.

“Huh? Another room already? It’s only the fifth floor. This dungeon sure is full of secrets. Could this be a bookstore dungeon?! All right! Let’s remodel the place and move in!”

My imagination raced with the possibilities. *What if it has sections for manga, video games, and even figures?*

“You’ve decided all that after finding a single book?”

“You’re just looking for an excuse to do a dungeon reno!”

“The last time you tried to renovate a dungeon, you fell into a pit to the lowest floor! Will you never learn?”

“Hmm, I feel like this location is a dealbreaker,” Vice Rep B said. “It’s nowhere near the town or even any villages.”

Fair point, no need to rush this plan.

“Right, I should shop around and look at other properties before making my decision.”

“Dungeons aren’t real estate,” the Class Rep shouted. “They’re obviously not on the market!”

For some reason, my classmates weren’t into the whole dungeon makeover scheme. *They must prefer new construction.*

“I mean, I get it, but building a new dungeon would be a huge pain in the ass, y’know? I’d need to dig deep just to see what’s under there before I could lay a proper foundation, so there’ll be holes everywhere. I mean, like, all over the realm, y’know?”

“Ugh, you still *don’t* get it!”

Glares in a dungeon just hit different. I was the only guy here, so I was getting three full groups’ worth of glares. The density of the glares was something special. My morning ritual of getting glared at by the guild receptionist was nothing like this. I had apparently gone to the Adventurers’ Guild this morning? Class Rep told me I shuffled into the guild like I was sleepwalking, mumbled complaints about the job board, and walked out after the head receptionist glowered at me. Was that even possible?

“Here it is, let’s see what we got—*Let’s Go Magic Items!* Huh? Why did they hide it on a different floor? That’s so inconvenient! Besides, can’t I find a different book series? These titles are just getting worse.”

The third volume. This was an advanced-level textbook. Everything about it was more difficult; even finding the necessary ingredients would be challenging. *What the hell?*

“Hey, there’s even a section on magic clothing! ‘The Prismatic Dress: A dress which uses magic power to change color according to the wearer’s preference.’ Damn, this is insanely hard to make! It doesn’t need any rare ingredients, but just processing this many spellstones sounds like way too much of a hassle. Why bother?”

Suddenly the girls were all shouting in my ear.

“I’ll pay any price, just make it! And make blouses! Skirts, too!”

“Take all the books we find in this dungeon. Just start making stuff!”

“Anything more exciting than these rags!”

“It’s a miracle! We’re saved!”

They gave me the book. And they wanted dresses—are you kidding me? Prismatic dresses, skirts, and blouses for twenty-one people would mean making sixty-three garments. *I can’t handle a workload that heavy*, I thought. *I’ll never get to sleep again!*

I hardly got any sleep yesterday because of all the custom orders I was working on. Though I was wide awake when it was time to take measurements. Especially when it came to Vice Rep A’s tight leather skirt and Vice Rep B’s pinafore dress. My eyes widened so much, I couldn’t even blink. Still, I etched every detail into my memory thanks to the all-seeing Jupiter Eye! *I remember when my measuring tape snapped to attention! All, boiyoyoing!*

“What’s with that dazed expression?!”

“Hello?!”

“.....”

“Pay attention!”

DAY 51

MORNING

If your girlfriend grabs your stomach in a fantasy world, you will explode into a ball of flame.

A DUNGEON

AFTER A SERIES of tense negotiations, we came to an agreement. Assuming I successfully produced prismatic clothes, the ten girls present today—the student council, Shield Girl, the sports girls, and Fish Girl—had priority on my first orders. After all, I needed to practice with a few prototypes before moving into mass production.

“I can’t decide between ordering a flared skirt or a dress. Can I order both so I don’t have to choose?”

“I get the sense that a top would be cheaper to make, but it feels like a shame to decide based on cost.”

“Since it can, like, change color, it would suck if we only got something seasonal, so we should totally get basics that work year-round, right?”

“Something simple and versatile is probably best, but should I get a top or a bottom? I want both! Come on, can’t we get extra orders?”

The Class Rep said, “I wear my cloak every day, so getting a prismatic cloak would be the most obvious choice, but it wouldn’t be cute at all!”

“T-shirts make sense, but that’d feel like a waste.”

“Blouses go with everything!”

“I still want a skirt, too,” Vice Rep C said. “Let’s just make additional orders. That’ll solve the problem!”

“More orders won’t solve anything,” I protested. “I asked you to pick one and you all just demanded both!”

This is the worst fantasy world to end up in, where I'm stuck as an overworked teenager freelancing in a sweatshop of my own design. The girls gained more and more debt every day, yet they kept pushing me around like I owed them. Why did I get the feeling that this whole situation was backwards?

"Quit daydreaming and get to work!" Vice Rep A said, staring daggers.

"Damn right," Vice Rep C squeaked. "Never underestimate the importance of fashion to teenage girls!"

"Make them now! Make them now!" Vice Rep B said, jumping up and down.

They're—they're shaking! N-never mind! Anyway, wasn't there something off about a dungeon crawl where we mostly talked about fashion and battled monsters merely as an afterthought?

"We need the perfect amount of cloth—shoo, stupid monster!"

"I think the cutest kind of top is always—get out of the way, die already!"

"And we can't just forget the accessories—Die! Die! Die!"

I wasn't going to have a chance to draw my weapon at all today. My Wooden Staff was just going to hang off my belt unused. I hadn't even touched it yet. There had never before been an adventurer for whom a divine sword was just a glorified paperweight. *This sucks.*

"I was so excited to try out my new Dimension Blade! Why'd I get benched like some kind of newbie?"

While working on other side projects last night, I devoted some time to upgrading my own equipment. I upgraded the Mana Cutter with mithril, and the description changed: "Mana Cutter: A magical sword with uncanny sharpness, Min Lv: 50. ()," adding the empty parentheses. After some experimentation, I confirmed that I could socket spellstones with embedded spell effects in those parentheses. *How to Magic Item!* described the process, but it had to be tested. As I socketed a spellstone charged with Teleport, the description updated again: "Dimension Blade: Attack power and range controlled with magic, Min Lv: 100. Dimensional Slash."

"Though a cloak really would be practi—Perish, beast!"

“I see what you mean, these monsters don’t care about fashion at all!”

“Maybe a color-changing school tracksuit?”

“Oh, what a good idea!”

“Why won’t anyone pay attention to me?” I asked. “I’m sick of this...”

Today was supposed to be the grand debut of my sword, yet I barely even got to glimpse a living monster before Miss Armor Rep inevitably delivered its spellstone to me.

That’s it, I’m taking the night off! My equipment wasn’t going to benefit from any more upgrades, and I was about to get flooded with new commissions. And before I slept I had to do some serious “sleeping,” which made getting to “sleep” early all the more important for my sleep!

Finally, we reached a proper secret chamber on the 10th floor. If it ended up being another book, I was going to be annoyed. There wasn’t nearly enough time to test everything out. *They should slow down their release schedule, make it a quarterly.*

“It’s only been five floors since the last treasure, right? What kind of pervert is hiding all these books? I mean, it makes sense if they’re banned, but how many banned books are there? Besides, I’m only sixteen. Is this even legal? What’re the age restrictions on banned books?”

The actual room was little more than an alcove with another book. This literally was a bookstore dungeon! *I’m definitely renovating this place!* Still, it seemed like it wasn’t well stocked, as they only had one copy of each book.

“Ah, I was right, this is a bookstore. Let’s see, this one is titled *The Compleat Cookerie Primer: Satisfy Your Boyfriend with a Shining Finger on His Stomach*. Run, Boyfriend, run! Shining Finger would blow up the poor man’s guts, like in *G Gundam*! It’s guaranteed death, a technique meant for battle!”

How the hell did a fantasy world have something called Shining Finger? Was God taunting me? Was Shining Finger just a euphemism for a satisfied stomach? It was just a normal cookbook inside. I found nothing in there about destroying a boyfriend’s GI tract with a Shining Finger Sword. Regardless, this book definitely deserved to be banned. Its title was horrific—any sequels were

probably even worse.

“A cookbook? You probably don’t need that, Haruka-kun. You’re already a master chef.”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind skimming through it,” I said, “but I don’t need to keep it, so if any of you girls want to learn how to cook, you can have it, y’know?”

A pause, followed by a chorus of girls saying, “Keep it, Haruka-kun!”

Were they implying that I was the only one who should cook? That didn’t feel fair. I wanted to experience the joy of a home-cooked meal prepared by a pretty girl! It was an important fantasy of every teenaged boy! The only thing the girls ever cooked was fried fish back in the cave! Sure, it was delicious, but it wasn’t a proper home-cooked meal.

“Wow, there are so many mysterious plants in here...I’ll track them down! What’s melting white butter? If I managed to make a bunch, it’d solve my butter shortage!” *I’m not sure I get the name, though. Is it so tasty it’ll make me melt? Does it melt ingredients? Wouldn’t that defeat the purpose of cooking, maybe?*

Back in Japan, so many folks walked around with their eyes glued to their phones that it was a problem. Not me, though—I didn’t even have a basic cellphone. The fantasy world equivalent was reading books while dungeon crawling, and I was guilty of that without a doubt. It didn’t matter, though. No one paid any attention to me, and monsters never got anywhere near me.

The girls were pretty focused and accepting when it came to securing food and clothing for the future, so they let me be, but when I started to renovate the dungeon a little bit, they got on my case! *You can’t live off of food and clothes alone; shelter is a basic necessity, too!*

Besides, what was the difference between renovating my cave and renovating a dungeon? Was this dungeon discrimination? A certain former dungeon emperor probably didn’t take kindly to that kind of bias. Although, at the moment, she was too busy killing things to notice.

“Whoa, there’s more: mystery fruits and veggies! So many mysteries!”

“Fruit?!”

“Uh, are we about to start a fantasy world fruit festival?!”

“Yes! All the fruits!”

“I think this is the beginning of a new chapter in our adventures. No more dungeons, only fruit picking!”

“Yes! Let’s have punch!”

“Punch, oh hell yeah, let’s make it a date! Let’s go harvest fruits from all the villages!”

Though we anticipated a far more exciting diet in the future, we still had to contend with a critical shortage of livestock in the frontier. With the monsters in the evil forest driven almost to extinction, the animal population had begun to recover, which provided a steady supply of meat for now, but it wasn’t sustainable. Hunting was unreliable, relegating game meats to a luxury foodstuff.

I needed to prioritize animal husbandry, but the book didn’t contain any info on how to do that. *Please let me find another volume*, I wished. *Please, mighty hopes, trigger a new event flag!*

“We formed these groups to slay dungeon bosses but we’ve somehow gotten roped into looking for books, haven’t we?” asked the Class Rep.

A tumult of voices: “Prismatic dresses are worth it!”

“You’re right! I *need* them! Get to work, Haruka-kun!”

She didn’t leave me with much choice. The girls were putting a lot of pressure on me to deliver! I was planning to craft a prototype dress tonight anyway, but they made it clear that I had no alternatives. That meant I had to do more measurements. It was too much for a teenage boy’s constitution; it was impossible to sleep after I took measurements. Even Miss Armor Rep had bags under her eyes today.

When will I sleep a full night again?

As we marched to the 50th floor, I kept reading to the soundtrack of wailing monsters and bloody battle. Miss Armor Rep was raring to go, so there was no chance of facing any monsters myself. *This way’s the safest, so I can’t complain,*

right?

On the 15th floor, I found *On the Sciences of Metallurgy and Alchemy*. An unexpectedly normal title, and its contents matched the cover: treatises on the methods of metalworking and alchemy.

“Is the world telling me to start yet another side gig?” I said. “This has to be a trap! Another dungeon trap! This fiendish dungeon is plotting to kill me through sleep deprivation! Oh, but this book is interesting. It even describes how to upgrade equipment with mithril. The techniques were exactly the same as the ones I discovered through experimentation and the sacrifice of countless hours of sleep. Give me back that time!”

After a time, one of the girls ventured, “Sorry for your loss?”

On the 20th floor, I found *The Field Guide to Botany*. This one was useful. *Being able to identify plants would be a massive boon*, I thought. It even stated whether a plant was edible, medicinal, or useful in any other way. I didn’t need to guess anymore. Each entry was rich with detail, listing common names, distribution, and possible uses. The only information missing was how to cultivate my own. Even without that, this book was one of the best finds yet.

I found *The Index of Skills* on the 25th floor. It contained descriptions of all known skills. This was like finding a strategy guide!

I flipped through it, looking for explanations of some of my more obscure skills, but my hopes were dashed. It didn’t have entries for General Health, Sensitivity, Calisthenics, Body Manipulation, or Walking Mastery. It didn’t even have entries on my thinking skills: Serial Thinking, Parallel Thinking, or the combined Supreme Thinking. Apparently, MP Absorption and Revival were monster-only skills.

Are you suggesting something about my humanity, book? Bring it on! I’ll burn you!

Anyway, it also lacked entries on Dash, Airwalk, Jupiter Eye, God’s Eye, Clairvoyance, Spell Eye, Wisdom Eye, and Eye Mastery. And although Puppetry and Mesmerize were mentioned as legendary skills, it made no mention of a

skill called Servitude.

DAY 51

MORNING

What's more rural than the remotest of humanity's frontiers?

A DUNGEON

THE DAY CONTINUED, I kept reading, and we descended further into the dungeon.

No, really, that's all we did: walked down some stairs, picked up a book, rinse and repeat. Our group was designed to take out the final dungeon boss, so we breezed through the dungeon.

Despite our surroundings, all any of the girls could talk about was clothes. Even Miss Armor Rep, having concluded her most recent bloodbath, joined in on the conversation. She removed her helmet and chatted with a smile on her face. She was happy, so I couldn't complain, but there was something off about acting like this in a dungeon.

On the 30th floor, I picked up a book from an altogether new series, *Country Living*.

"This is obviously meant for me! *I'm* living in the countryside! I'm literally living in a cave in the woods of a frontier! Nothing more rural than that."

Despite living the country life, nothing was slow and relaxed about it. It was a hardcore struggle for survival!

"You can't call where you live the countryside! It can't even be called a wilderness!"

"That's not backcountry, it's monster country," Vice Rep C said.

"There is literally nothing but monsters there," Vice Rep B agreed.

I was stuck in a cave, working my ass off every single night! I needed to find a place to move where I could properly live the life of a shut-in...

“Yeah, that’s what I’ll do, I’ll retire, y’know?” I said to myself. “Not like I have to actually do anything; I can totally just retire!”

Even so, a book on farm management was nice to have. They were detailed enough to be academic textbooks. It was the perfect guide to reforming the agriculture of this realm.

Also, it seemed like talking to myself really did trigger event flags! The books were probably here before I said anything, but it seemed way too convenient to be a coincidence.

“I’ll make the nerds read this book, too. They might pick up a lot of great administration cheats and I can consult with them. Then, we can incorporate animal husbandry into my reforms!”

“Meat!” the girls shouted.

It was apparent at this point that no one in this world knew how to title a book. Someone should’ve published *Naming Books for Dummies* first. *I want the author of How to Magic Item! to read it right away, for real!*

The silver blade gleamed in the darkness. In other words, because of Miss Armor Rep, I had nothing to do. We reached the 35th floor. *Miss Armor Rep seems a bit too into this, y’know?* It felt like she was giving us a guided tour of the dungeon.

There was a secret room down here, precisely five floors after the last, which confirmed my hypothesis. This dungeon had a secret every five floors. Another book—*The Compleat Encyclopedia of Weapon Techniques*. Great.

“Meh, who cares,” I said, tossing it aside.

“You didn’t even open it,” Class Rep cried.

“Combat skills are for regular one-on-one combat, aren’t they? I’d get killed if I tried fighting like that.”

“Oh, of course, how could I forget?” she replied.

“You’ve never even come close to dying, how could you expect anyone to remember your excuses?” Vice Rep A asked.

Combat skills were the basis of most normal fights, which is why levels were supposed to be a big deal. They were powerful, but a fighter who used them couldn't interrupt their execution to dodge or run away. As awesome as they were, they left the user wide open.

I couldn't use something like that—I'd die instantly. Sharing the book between ourselves would be best. The nerds had started researching technique combos, so they would definitely benefit.

"I might learn any instant-kill technique if there's one in there, but it's probably pointless at my level, y'know? I'm still in the teens."

Miss Armor Rep nodded, so that was that.

This dungeon was almost as long as their conversation about fashion.

"How many clothes do you expect me to make? You wear the same armor every day, anyway!"

I was met with a chorus of protests. "Girls *like* clothes, okay?"

Did I have to keep hustling until the town entered the modern age? I needed to send a new proposal to Mr. Meridad right away! We needed to prioritize basic necessities!

If the farming reforms produced a surplus of food, then we could turn our attention to livestock. The agriculture of the region would naturally grow more sophisticated from there. As for housing, I had already submitted a proposal on the basics of modern architecture. This was my punishment for letting textiles fall by the wayside!

If I wanted to create a wider supply of fabrics, I had to first industrialize the textile industry. The people could develop their own designs, but production needed to get scaled up. That meant that I had to develop industrial magic-powered looms to replace hand-weaving. How did I end up in a world where I had to kickstart the industrial revolution, starting with fabrics, as a freelance gig? *This isn't normal, not at all.*

There was a serious imbalance of power among us. Think about it: our class

was made of twenty-one girls and ten guys. Four of the guys were oblivious nerds unfit for any social situation, and another five were complete idiots. *This is hopeless!*

We could never get a word in edgewise. There was nothing we could do—none of us could resist helping a bunch of cute girls. Twenty-one girls in all, and I was in an even more dire situation: eleven girls and only one guy—me!

From the outside, this must look like a harem, but I was totally powerless against them. They overwhelmed me just in terms of numbers!

Not only were they always in the majority, but they were far more persuasive than any of us guys. And now they had Miss Armor Rep on their side. She held so much sway with me that I couldn't avoid getting exploited! Granted, I emptied their pockets more than once, but they didn't seem to care about their debts! They had expensive taste, but I certainly wasn't going to do anything to mess up the current situation. Being surrounded by beautiful girls was a ton of fun, even if it meant working myself to death.

“We’re gonna be rich and eat delicious food!”

“Woohoo!”

It was easy for me to get swept up in whatever they wanted. I liked making these girls laugh and smile, so I ended up making sweets, cooking dinner, making clothes and accessories, and so on.

When I first encountered them in the forest, their faces were contorted with fear, sadness, and exhaustion. In their resignation and despair, they could do little but stare blankly, the last sparks of hope extinguished in their eyes. I could never forget those expressions. I never wanted to see their faces like that again.

That’s why I wanted them to laugh, to smile, to have fun, to be happy. That was reason enough for my self-imposed overworked sweatshop labor.

Being a teenage boy is tough! I’ll vent my frustrations on those useless nerds and meatheads when I get back, I thought. I swear it!

“As expected, another secret chamber on the 40th floor,” I said. “This really is the bookstore dungeon. Will the bottom floor have a bookshelf? Oh man, let’s clear this dungeon ASAP! No flooding or burning—I forbid it! No getting reckless

either. We don't want to damage any books! Miss Armor Rep and I are the only two allowed on the final floor! Vice Rep B, that goes double for you!"

"Oh dear, what did I do?"

You keep swinging and bouncing all over the damn—ahem.

Vice Rep B was an Archsage. Her magic alone was enough to destroy countless books, but the real danger was something else in her case. She went totally berserk in fights—smashing, bashing, shattering, and wrecking everything in her path! And I wasn't just worried about how she swung her weapons, either. I couldn't concentrate when other parts swung in my field of vision. For some reason, Jupiter Eye automatically focused on her gigantic rack!

"Letting you two handle the fight doesn't bother me," Class Rep said, "but I won't be able to stop worrying if we're not together, so we'll be right behind you, just in case. Hang on, are you thinking something filthy right now? You're guilty, aren't you?"

"Oh my giddy aunt," I said convincingly, "could this be another secret room? What sort of *secrets* will we find here? What hidden treasure will we unearth? A book called *Herbalism*—how incredible, y'know?"

"Are you going to complain about the title again?"

"No, this one's awesome. I can't believe they banned this one!" I said.

What sort of awful world bans a book on medicine? It went in-depth on different types of herbs and how to turn them into potions, poultices, unguents, and other medicines, as well as recommended treatments for various illnesses.

Since surgery wasn't a viable option with medieval-level medicine, the book only focused on pharmacological remedies. Spells and mushrooms could recover HP, but they didn't do anything for serious wounds or illnesses. True healing mushrooms and potions were apparently incredibly rare and precious.

The status quo wasn't good enough. This book needed to be copied and distributed immediately. It would do no good if I was the only person with medical knowledge—I could only do so much. Books could transmit knowledge to many people. The more people gathering herbs and making salves, the more patients could be saved. Of course, I talked myself into another part-time job.

This time, I was going to establish a printing press.

“By the way, Miss Armor Rep, the monsters are getting stronger, so you shouldn’t fight them by yourself. I know you’ll be okay, but be mindful of your own safety, if you know what I mean.”

She nodded in understanding. We had reached the 45th floor. Miss Armor Rep was nearly level 30, but her stats remained relatively low. No one would guess from watching her, but a single hit from one of these monsters would put her in mortal danger. These monsters were getting crafty, and they fought in packs, so we couldn’t drop our guard.

Five monsters stood between us and the next treasure room—no, there were two more further ahead, so seven in total.

“There are seven level 45 chimeras ahead, beast-type, and they’re dangerous. They won’t go down easily, so everyone stay safe, okay?”

These were probably the most dangerous monsters we would fight before the 50th floor. They were a horrifying amalgam of other beasts, multiple heads, extra hearts, and even multiple spellstones at times. They traveled in packs and were likely to survive even critical hits, so tanks were a better matchup against them than damage dealers. It was less risky.

Worst of all, chimeras absorbed the abilities of anything they ate. Some could potentially use magic. They could’ve even eaten adventurers. We had no way of knowing what skills they were hiding.

“Form a shield wall! Hold fast!” the Class Rep ordered.

“On it!”

There weren’t that many of them, and they didn’t seem to have any special skills. So overall it seemed safe, but you never knew what could happen in the chaos of battle.

“I don’t think any of them are *particularly* bad, but they’re all pretty bad, y’know?” I said.

“That’s not helpful!”

“Okay!”

Miss Armor Rep and I, the glass cannons of the group, would stay in the back, provide magical support, and engage in hit-and-run tactics. This was technically the safest strategy.

“We listened to you and even stayed in a defensive formation as we approached, so why is our *rearguard* attacking with instant kills?!”

“What happened to avoiding danger?!”

“Well, you see, I was itching to try out my Dimension Blade. Just a small test, y’know? I was just thinking that it would be cool if I did some damage, okay? I didn’t do anything dangerous on purpose, you gotta believe me!”

I wanted to do a quick hit-and-run—just one attack before I slipped back into formation. Although, I did charge right at the chimeras.

“Look at what you did to the wall of the dungeon!!”

It was my first time using Dimensional Slash, so I might’ve charged it with a *smidge* too much MP. Not only did I slice through all the chimeras, everything in a 100-foot radius in front of me was blown to bits.

Teleport was apparently a type of Void magic, so when it was used as an attack it banished anything in its way to the void. It was dangerous—so dangerous it shouldn’t be used near allies. If I lost control, people could get hurt.

“You didn’t think that was dangerous?!” the Class Rep yelled. “Get in the back!”

“Er, well, it was just a little mistake, right? I didn’t mean for that to happen, y’know?”

It was like Life or Death augmented with Teleport—an instantaneous attack at any range. There was no dodging it. I didn’t have full control of it yet, so I burned through too much of my MP in one go. I also might’ve decided to teleport at the same time as I unleashed the Dimensional Slash, and therefore couldn’t control my attack very well. So, it was a little reckless, but I couldn’t help myself! Every skill I got made me do reckless things!

This wasn't the kind of attack I could chain into a combo. If I even wanted to try that, I'd have to learn how to channel way less MP. I needed to practice it before I could use it in battle.

I was hardly able to control the attack this time. Using Holding magic, Magic Control, and Supreme Thinking was barely enough to contain the raw power of the attack, and I still managed to cause so much devastation.

"Come to think of it, I do have a divine sword slotted in my staff. That probably made it more dangerous. Oh right, I also slotted a Void Staff in there! No wonder it erased everything in its path!"

That, of course, included the chimeras, as it seemed to completely bypass their immunities to Slash and Magic damage.

There's no way I can sell this thing, I thought. It could cut the likes of us apart instantly. It was definitely too dangerous to use when sparring with Miss Armor Rep. There didn't seem to be any way to block it. *It's so dangerous that I feel like I should just seal it away.*

DAY 51

NOON

I don't at all in the least slightest most remotely tiny quantity hate it.

A DUNGEON

THE GIRLS CARRIED ON lecturing me as we entered the secret chamber.

I couldn't have guessed that it would cause so much damage! I just *had* to try an attack with a name as cool as Dimensional Slash! I didn't know it would literally slice through dimensions!

If I didn't contain the attack, the MP would've overloaded and who knew what would happen then. So I understood their complaints, but they kept lecturing me over breaking formation and intercepting the poor, blown-to-bits chimeras.

"Why's that dangerous?" I asked, confused. "I was going to rejoin the formation right after. It was supposed to be a regular Life or Death attack, y'know? That was totally safe! Even if I did kind of dive right into the fray."

"In what way is that safe?"

The Dimension Blade was supposed to be a long-range attack with teleport and all. I had no idea its radius would be so big. *I'll have to only use it at point-blank range from now on, which means I'll have to keep getting up close and personal with monsters.*

Anyway, I did rejoin the group, didn't I? I figured that Teleport magic would've given me some ranged offensive options, but it seemed like its only use was for reckless attacks.

"Another hidden room. The book this time is *True Herbalism*. Huh? Did that mean everything in *Herbalism* was bullshit? But I read it so carefully!"

"Stop bitching about the titles!"

At this rate, the next volume would be something like *Extreme Herbalism* or *Secrets of Herbalism*, and the one after that would be titled *Ultimate Herbalism* or something! Should I expect *Final Herbalism*, too?!

“I wouldn’t mind a few of those. But I’d need to make copies of all of them, and that means even more work! When will it end?!”

Thus, we cleared the 45th floor. Soon, we would face the final boss on the 50th floor. It was time to prepare ourselves for the epic battle ahead—or not.

“Pants are way more functional!”

“Sure, but skirts are simply the cutest, aren’t they?”

“I think a dress would look best, but only one prismatic garment would seem incomplete, wouldn’t it?”

“H-how about a p-prismatic hat?” Miss Armor Rep suggested.

“Accessories, of course!”

“Haruka-kun, we’re going to need to put in some more orders!”

They didn’t care in the slightest, they just demanded even *more* clothes! Who approved this law that I had to fill more orders? Though it wasn’t like I could’ve vetoed it. So yes, I agreed to make them hats tonight, especially since Miss Armor Rep asked for one.

Besides, more clothes meant more profits.

As a teenage boy, taking measurements was proving itself to be a real problem. I had asked the general store lady to take care of women’s underwear, but she was way behind schedule. The girls’ custom orders were too fancy for the level of tech this world offered.

There was no way a teenage boy could make women’s underwear, though. It was way too distracting. Just listening to their requests would’ve been enough to mortally wound my charisma and reputation. That was why the town seamstresses were handling those orders. If I handled the orders myself, it wouldn’t just be a wound for me, it’d be game, set, and match! *I’ll even ignore the end-of-game whistle and keep scoring!* If the ref looked the other way, I would never, ever stop!

There was no way to know for sure, but I highly suspected that no one in this world had ever raided a dungeon while focused entirely on designing clothes. Even more unusual was the fact that the dungeon held fewer hazards to my health than crafting. In that moment, I understood the true nature of sorrow, and felt close to unlocking an ultimate technique—a crafting technique, of course.

“They’re on the ceiling!”

“Watch out for the exploding bats!”

“Haruka-kun, get down before they blow you up! Huh?”

“What?!”

On the 48th floor, I made all of the level 48 Bomb Bats self-destruct. The girls had made this floor sound like a lot of trouble, but the bats had a glaringly obvious weak point.

It was a colony of explosive bats that shrieked at us from the darkness, but they were still so easy to counter.

“Why are they all exploding?!” the girls screamed.

“Check their status! They have the Ultrasonic Wave skill, get it?”

I merely had to still the air with Holding Magic and use Vibration at high enough speeds to create ultrasonic waves. Unable to navigate through all the noise, they crashed into each other and blew themselves up. The entire colony was wiped out, but picking up each and every spellstone was so tedious.

“I ought to come up with some sort of magic way to collect spellstones. This sucks!”

“Here we were casting Wind spells to blow them away, running for our *lives*, and that’s what you have to say?!”

“Well, it was better to blow them up when they were by the ceiling than let them blow up in our faces.”

This was just logical thinking.

“It took us two days to get past this floor!”

“Who would come up with your strategy just from seeing their Ultrasonic Wave skill!”

“They never even stood a chance, you forced them to self-destruct before they could get anywhere near us!”

“Those poor lil’ bats.”

Everyone was unhappy for some reason, but this was indisputably the most rational approach to bomb bat disposal—detonate from a safe distance. Freezing would be a temporary solution, and other disposal methods like disassembling or defusing a bomb were far less safe.

This was just common sense. Naturally, as I was such a pragmatic, levelheaded, common-sense kind of guy.

Two floors until the dungeon boss, but the girls simply resumed their conversation about fashion instead of preparing for battle. The subject of conversation had moved on from Vice Rep B’s pinafore dress to a debate about maid outfits.

I had no objections. In fact, it was fair to say that I was a huge fan of this topic. *Even so, getting caught in the company of a bunch of teenage girls dressed like maids would imperil my sex appeal.* Did they care so little about my reputation? My sex appeal was already on life support! *It’s in critical condition, respiration has stopped!*

“There isn’t even the smallest iota of dislike in all my being for maid outfits, but those seem *really* hard to sew, y’know? You realize I have to make everything by hand, right?”

“But they’re so cute!”

“Just pretend cuteness is justice, and you’ll make ’em, no problem!”

I truly could never hate on maids, but the patterns were a nightmare. Same objection I had to making princess gowns.

Not an ounce of dislike for the final result, but it was guaranteed to be a major challenge, especially when it came to taking measurements for

aforementioned teenage boy reasons.

As we stepped onto the next floor, Fish Girl said, “Here on the 49th floor, I got chased around by scary level 49 Terror Knights!”

Whenever Fish Girl fought a monster, she ended up getting chased by it while Shield Girl went tumbling through the air. Was it some sort of secret strategy?

The atmosphere was foreboding. Terror knights wore black armor and their attacks dealt Phantasmal damage.

Logically, they were weak to Holy damage, but instead of taking advantage of that, our mighty Archsage just walloped them with her staff. She pretty much fought all ghostly monsters like that!

Malevolence swirled in a thick miasma around us. Their attacks all induced status ailments: Fear, Panic, Confusion, and Paralysis. The girls had plenty of gear to resist ailments, so there shouldn’t be any problems as long as they kept their distance. The only danger they had to worry about was looking the monsters in the eyes at close range.

It wasn’t a problem for me, as I had Jupiter Eye. Besides, I had yet to suffer a status ailment, even in the deeper parts of dungeons. My “Wooden Staff?” dealt Holy damage, too. With all my advantages, I decided to jump into the front lines...

“Eeyargh! A massacre! No, death isn’t enough for what you did! You didn’t hit me with a measly status ailment, you assaulted my very soul!”

“The terror knights are trembling and avoiding your gaze!”

Why did these so-called terror knights fall into a state of complete horror, confusion, and paralysis when I looked at them?!

“Why are the terror knights the ones that are terrified? They’re tanking my sex appeal! Nooo! My sweet, sweet sex appeal!”

Evil perished, and along with it, my reputation. My heart’s HP had to have hit 0 by now.

Vice Rep A spoke first: “Those dread knights, panic-stricken, and slain without

mercy before they can escape—does this herald the coming of the Demon King of Terror?!”

“Are...are they screaming?” asked Vice Rep B.

“This is unbelievable. The terror knights started crying as soon as they looked Haruka-kun in the eye!”

“I think a few dropped dead when he looked at them!”

“Oh my god, did they just give up the will to live—err, whatever you would call the evil phantom equivalent of living!”

Damn it, how low is my appeal, really?

“They’re trembling like scared little chihuahuas!”

“Not again,” I said. “N-not again! Why do demons and evil phantoms always target my precious sex appeal?! They score crits on my ego, every single time!”

Miss Armor Rep patted me gently on the back. Did I imagine it, or did she sheathe her sword even before I faced the terror knights, as if she knew she would have to console me? *I hope it’s just my imagination!* Why wouldn’t she look at me?

I became so upset that I used Dimensional Slash. I had no regrets, except that they deserved to die more than once! Oh, and it used tons of MP.

“I’m going to have some stern words with the management around here! Time for the final boss to take responsibility for these terror knights! I’m gonna give that jerk a piece of my mind! It’ll rue the day it messed with me! If we can’t talk things out, I’ll take it out! Vengeance is nigh, y’know?”

“Wow, he’s so agitated that he jumped straight to murder.”

“Haruka-kun wants revenge despite the dungeon boss having done nothing yet?”

“I mean, we *are* here to kill it, but you don’t have to make it personal.”

Despite getting bullied only moments ago, the girls gave me flat, reproachful looks. Little did they know that eleven pairs of eyes all focusing their

exasperation at me was enough to heal my wounded ego. I was addicted to girls glaring at me, and suffering from withdrawal until this moment. *This condition has no known cure.*

DAY 51

NOON

From all of my life and fantasy world experience, there is only one possibility I can imagine.

A DUNGEON

THE 50TH FLOOR lay ahead, along with the dungeon's final boss. This was our last chance to sort out any pressing problems. I needed to make sure we were all on the same page. I needed to say something before we threw ourselves headlong into bloodshed.

"I'm sorry, but I can't ignore this any longer. I have let something go unresolved for too long—Should we eat lunch *before* or *after* we kill the dungeon boss? What do you all think? I'm fine with either option. The timing's inconvenient either way, but I can't recommend eating lunch in the middle of a boss fight, y'know? That can't be good for the digestion."

If we ate before, it would be too early, and after would be a bit past noon. Despite this, I was convinced that eating during a fight would get messy. Why was everyone glaring at me?

"*That's* the only thing you're worried about?" Class Rep asked.

"Indigestion is *absolutely* the least dire consequence of eating in the midst of a boss battle," said Vice Rep B.

"And the feeling of tension before a fight is gone, just like that," Vice Rep A said.

They shouldn't discount the importance of a balanced diet. We were all still growing, after all.

"You gotta eat! You are what you eat, and if you're eating nothing, that's what you'll be, y'know?" I said. "Nutrients are fuel for your body, how could you expect to function without fuel? It would be like fighting a boss with no

HP!”

Exercising on an empty stomach sucked, but a full stomach was almost as bad.

“It’s best to eat about thirty minutes after any serious exercise. That promotes muscle growth, y’know? I’m not kidding, this is far more serious than the dungeon boss. I’m not wrong, okay?”

The Class Rep thought for a moment and said, “Did you actually try to make a serious argument in your defense?”

“Is maintaining a healthy lifestyle really that important?” asked a sports girl.

“You can’t trust anything he has to say about health!” snapped Miss A. “He thought the only problem with eating during a boss battle was an upset stomach.”

“Good point!”

Some people believed that exercising after a meal was good for digestion, but in reality, it had the exact opposite effect. Even warm-up exercises could cause heartburn, acid reflux, and indigestion. I honestly couldn’t think of a single good reason to eat while fighting the dungeon boss. *Not to mention the risk of nausea!*

“You can’t take anything he says seriously!” exclaimed the Fish Girl. “It’s all lies and trickery!”

“It’s true. Every time you think he has a point, you lose some of your common sense,” said Vice Rep A.

“He might sound like he’s right about something, but no matter how valid his arguments are, he’s still wrong.”

“Got it! It’s best to take his every word with a barrel of salt!”

“Wait,” I protested feebly. “How can my arguments be right if I’m always wrong?!”

And I didn’t remember any lies or trickery! Would a swindler be trapped in an endless cycle of poverty and overwork? I was just an honest, hard-working teenager. Seriously.

After a vote, we decided to have lunch first. The vote was unanimous.

“We’re having oyakodon—chicken and egg rice bowls—for lunch. Please don’t debate which came first while you’re eating, okay, you’ll get indigestion!”

“Why would we debate while eating?!”

“Did you just say oyakodon? Shut up and give us the grub!”

“I think he might actually *want* to eat during a fight,” Vice Rep A said while shooting me an accusing look.

“Mmm, the eggs are still so gooey, and the chicken—sooo *moist* and *juicy*!” gushed Vice Rep B.

“The onions are delicious, too. They’re perfectly caramelized!”

“The rice is so fluffy!”

“Ahh, a dungeon lunch of oyakodon! I’m joining Haruka-kun’s group!”

“Traitor! You would choose lunch over your friends?...On second thought, me too!”

I couldn’t form a group if I wanted to, thanks to Loner, so I wasn’t sure what they hoped to accomplish.

“Thanks for the meal! That was delicious,” said the Class Rep.

“I’m completely stuffed.”

“Such bliss!”

I said, “I’m glad you all enjoyed the meal. I figured that katsudon—pork cutlet bowls—would be too heavy for lunch, so I decided to make something with a bunch of mystery eggs and mystery tastes-like-chicken meat, y’know?”

“Katsudon sounds amazing, but can you not remind us that we don’t know what we’re eating?”

“Mystery eggs? Oh my!”

“Let’s not focus on the unknown origins of our ingredients, okay? It’s ruining my appetite.”

Honestly, I didn't think the mystery eggs even came from the same species. They were a different size and color every time I bought them—they could be dinosaur eggs for all I knew!

Anyway, I had planned on making the pork cutlets for dinner: I made some tonkatsu sauce, seasoned and breaded the mystery meat, chopped up a bunch of mystery greens and mystery mushrooms for salad, and whipped up plenty of mayo! I sacrificed my sleep to finish all this prep!

Most of my income came from selling food to the girls. Though, in this case, every meal they ate only added to their outstanding debts, so I still wasn't making any money! Surviving in a fantasy world wasn't easy.

Ever since coming to this world, none of the girls could remember how to cook. Somehow, they traded in all their real-life skills for magic and battle skills. It was like they completely abandoned what made them high school girls!

Appetites satisfied, it was time to face the dungeon boss. We had to prepare for the worst or there'd be trouble, but they immediately resumed their conversation about fashion. I hoped they wouldn't force me to make any more clothes.

In this world, it seemed like death from overwork was a far bigger danger than monsters or the level wall. Oh well, I still needed to get paid.

The Class Rep unsheathed her weapon and yelled, "Let's do this!"

"Yeah!" the rest of the girls cheered.

Somehow, we had a serious, conventional boss battle with the dungeon king. It was like a normal fight.

The dungeon king could shape-shift at will. It dashed across the field of battle with extreme agility, swinging its sword, parrying with its shield, cloaking itself in Lightning magic, and transforming into a raging inferno. It overwhelmed us with an endless barrage of attacks.

On top of being extremely tough, it had no obvious weaknesses. This boss was as traditional as you could ask for. Though it seemed a bit...blobby?

I checked its status: a level 100 Slime Emperor. I'd never heard of a slime that

could do what this slime was doing.

“It’s too strong! I can’t corner it!”

“I can’t read its movements, either!”

“Stick to formation!”

Because of its Physical Immunity, neither Slash nor Bludgeon damage had any effect. Spells weren’t any use, either—the thing had Magic Immunity, too. It could even hold its own in swordplay against Miss Armor Rep.

“How can we win?!”

“I literally have no clue what its weaknesses are,” I said. “Slimes are normally early-game monsters!”

The slime jiggled before me.

“O-oh, uh, hello?” I said in response.

Aw, it’s so cute! This wasn’t an oozing, revolting slime, nor was it sticky and unpleasant. No, it was soft and jiggly and adorable! But it looked angry, like it was in a bad mood.

Vice Rep A, unable to believe her eyes, asked, “Is it blushing?!”

Until now, it was yellow and enveloped in a sparking electrical aura. It suddenly turned red and started lobbing fireballs. As if on cue, Shield Girl got blown away.

“No, it’s fuming!”

It was an adorable lil’ springy slime—but ridiculously strong.

Even Miss Armor Rep and the Class Rep attacking simultaneously while Vice Rep A flanked it with her four-sword technique didn’t work. The slime countered every attack. Vice Rep C’s high-speed whirling didn’t work either. It bounced around unpredictably at high speeds, so its movements were impossible to pin down.

“Stay on the defensive! Don’t break formation! This is a strong one!”

“Got it!”

The bouncy slime buddy started pulling out countless swords, spears, and shields. It must've had Void magic or some sort of infinite storage skill. For some reason, it didn't seem to be using magic that seriously against us, yet it could resist every single one of our magic attacks. It was a complete package: strong both physically and magically—and super adorable!

It was toying with us. The slime emperor moved without telegraphing its attacks. Not like I could've recognized if it did telegraph any attacks; all it could do was jiggle cutely.

“Let's try a ranged attack! Just keep up the defenses!”

“We're trying, but it's too tough!”

This thing was so strong that Miss Armor Rep might actually have to let loose. But since they were doing coordinated attacks, she held back her full strength.

The slime shook off every blow of their perfectly executed combos with a charming little wiggle. As it did, I couldn't help but notice that Miss B wiggled and bounced right next to me.

“...”

With no warning, I was blindsided by an extreme multi-glare combo! *Do we really have the time for this?*

“Haruka-kun, stop staring and do something!”

“What? Don't you see how cute it is, with all its bouncing and jiggling? I couldn't resist.”

It was so perfectly round and bouncy and shiny! How could I not give it a good peep?

The Class Rep stared daggers at me. “You had better be talking about that slime!”

“O-of course I w-w-was talking about the s-s-slime! Wh-what else b-besides Slisleeme-san?”

“Who's Slisleeme-san supposed to be and why were you staring at her?!”

I didn't think that we could defeat it at this rate. Bouncing all over, it charged

at us like it was angry about something. We were unlawful trespassers, so it had a right to be mad at us...even in its cute, jelly-like manner.

The wobbly little slime fought with such earnestness, even as it simply bumped into us.

Drawing on all my life experiences, both before and after coming to this world, I knew that it had a weakness. There was a guaranteed path to certain victory. *There's no way I can lose with this!*

"Do you want a sweet? I have it on good authority that it's delicious, y'know. Stalker Girl claimed it was *yam-mazing*."

Jiggle jiggle!

Good thing I brought some candied sweet potatoes with me. Poor thing, it must've been starving, trapped down here all alone. Were all dungeon bosses like that—hungry and lonely?

"What are you doing?!"

"Please be careful!"

"Hungry little buddy, ain'tcha?"

Wiggle wiggle.

I pulled out my frying pan and started frying up some pork cutlets, tossing them to the slime when they were golden-brown.

"Who wants some bread? Do you want a tasty loaf? Although, I don't think slimes know about the importance of a balanced and healthy diet."

Wobble wobble!

Jiggling, it wrapped its slime body around the bread and cutlets, which vanished into who knows where.

"Lonely and hungry, huh? I know how that is."

Wiggle wiggle.

That was why it was grumpy enough to attack us. But it was also so ravenous that it couldn't even use magic.

Jiggle jiggle.

Now that the slime was full of good food, it looked content. It even settled in on top of my head and fell asleep. It was just as cute and wobbly when it slept. Apparently, it could alter its size—it shrunk down now until it could fit comfortably on my head.

“D-did you just make the dungeon boss a pet?!”

“He gave it some food and now it’s totally attached!”

“Aren’t you worried about the dungeon king sitting on your head?!”

Uh no, of course not. He’s a sweet, wibbly-wobbly li’l slime.



DAY 51

AFTERNOON

Is a meeting necessary if the opinion is completely unanimous with no objections?

A DUNGEON

PLACING MY PALM against the wall, I gave a firm push, revealing the final secret chamber of the dungeon.

“What have we got here? A three-volume set? Does it come with any extras?”

No extras, but the books were *The Grimoire of Combat Skills*, *The Grimoire of Titles*, and *The Grimoire of Magic*. I had the sneaking suspicion that none of these volumes would explain my skills, either. *Is it because I’m a loner?!*

I looked up at the slime and asked, “Can I borrow these? I mean since you’re the landlord of this dungeon and all.”

Jiggle jiggle.

The slime seemed okay with it.

“Is he talking to the dungeon king?!”

“Why did he call it a landlord?!”

“It totally loves him!”

“There’s something cute about it, even though it’s so powerful.”

I skimmed through *The Grimoire of Magic* first. As expected, none of my absurd magic skills got any mention: not Heat, Movement, Weight, or Packing! No details on Wood or Vibration magic, either! Naturally, it didn’t cover the advanced versions of those skills, like Teleport, Gravity, and Holding. I didn’t even need to check *The Grimoire of Titles* to know that Shut-In, Loner, and NEET weren’t mentioned.

“Of course Shut-In, NEET, and Loner aren’t in there. How would you even

translate those terms into this world's language? I knew it! All my skills are fake!"

The slime wobbled with concern.

Flipping through the last grimoire, it made no mention of Cane Mastery. *You hear that, Miss B? You're also using fake skills!* Naturally, that meant Peerless Cane Mastery wasn't listed, either. Nor was there an entry for Magic Infusion or its upgrade, Magic Entanglement.

"I invented Life or Death, so at least there's a reason why it's not listed..."

Jiggle jiggle.

Still, it was weird that the skills I used to develop my own invented skills weren't listed. Even weirder, some of the skills I had were categorized as legendary: skills like Evasion, Rapid Movement, Bubble, and Eye Mastery. It even claimed that skills like Sword Master and Sword Goddess were just myths. Myths? The Sword Goddess herself was standing right here!

Jiggle jiggle?

And there wasn't even a section on Abilities. Corporate Proactiveness, Master of None, and Blockhead would remain a mystery.

"These books are useless! Unless...does this mean my skills are so useless they may as well not exist?"

"Hey, all of my skills are listed!"

"Mine too!"

Bounce bounce.

Was the slime trying to become friends with everyone?

"Well, I was already one hundred, one thousand, one million percent certain those titles did not exist, I mean, Shut-In, NEET, Loner—those words don't even exist in this world's language!" I exclaimed.

So why were they working so well? How was language getting translated here anyway? *Don't tell me, I don't wanna know.*

Jiggle jiggle.

“I think the slime is trying to console him.”

“The former dungeon emperor is patting him on the back, too.”

“Two of the most powerful beings in the world lined up to comfort him,” Vice Rep A said coolly. “What a waste of their strength.”

I doubted that I could find any more books here, so there was no point sticking around any longer...and I didn't want to kill the dungeon king either.

He was so damn cute and friendly, so fighting was right out. After eating its fill, he was much more placid. Maybe he was trying to eat the girls earlier? *Well, he's cute, so whatever.*

Wobble wobble?

The slime must have been so lonely.

“Hey, wanna join us? Know what I mean?”

Jiggle jiggle!

He performed a cute little dance! Did that mean he was happy? It looked like happy wibbling, anyway.

“Uhh, let's see your Status. Oh, did I use Servitude on you? Really?”

“We all knew this'd happen!”

This was definitely a happy dance. The slime and the Poster Girl had a lot in common. They both liked to do mysterious dances.

Wiggle wiggle!

First, we had to get out of here, then I could feed the slime lots of tasty food. He wouldn't be lonely anymore if he came with us and stayed at the inn, too. He seemed to like that idea, so why not?

“Let's go, okay? Don't forget, we have two more properties to tour!”

“You're talking about dungeons!”

“Wait, are we dungeon crawling or house hunting?”

“But the other residence sounds so lonely! It must be all alone, poor thing.”

“It's not a residence!”

So, this turned out not to be a bookstore in the end. *Definitely not worth renovating.* It was in a terrible location and had a confusing floorplan. It was more like an anthill than anything else.

Dungeons with nice layouts like the Ultimate Dungeon weren't exactly common, after all. It was in a great location, and excellent building quality, but it was way too big to be comfortable. A property with one hundred floors was overkill.

"Hey, Slime-san—can I call you Slimey? This here is Miss Armor Rep, she became my servant first, so she's your senpai, okay? So, you should listen to what she says. Besides, since she used to be an emperor of all dungeons, she kind of also used to be your boss before, y'know?"

Slimey wobbled with understanding. This was a proper workplace hierarchy now. Was he trying to give her a salute? Were they acquaintances, since they used to work in the same industry? Did they go to dungeon management conferences together or something? Now that they had both quit their jobs, would they start meeting up with other dungeon alumni?

"I can't believe he enslaved *another* dungeon boss to take home with us."

"Hey, at least this time it wasn't another emperor, right?"

"Sure, I guess in comparison, this is more normal."

Despite their petty complaints, the girls were all feeding the former dungeon king bread and candy. Slimey jiggled with joy. He was so cute and tame!

As we packed up to go, the girls resumed their fashion chat. After some hotly contested debate, they came to a consensus: "Make us more orders!"

Did my objections count for nothing? We headed back with the slime wiggling contentedly atop my head. It was so soothing.

"You get it, Slimey. We all need some respite from this cruel world! Consider the cruelty of forcing me to fulfill even more orders! Besides, what was the point of having these discussions if they unanimously agreed on everything?! There was no deliberation, they just blazed through their agenda!"

“Fashion matters!” they shouted.

I needed to come up with blueprints for magic-powered weaving and sewing machines, or my lifespan would get dramatically shorter.

The girls from the sports clubs had previously made it all the way to the 49th floor, so we were able to instantly gate back to the entrance, now in the company of a joyfully bouncing Slimey. If we hadn’t bothered checking each floor for secret rooms, this dungeon would’ve been cleared in moments. Since we investigated every floor, this trip took a while. *A secret every five floors!* The next property shouldn’t take this long to inspect, but two tours in one day sounded impossible.

“Is the next dungeon the one the school council group checked out? Is it nearby? What do you think, is it good? How walkable is the neighborhood? What about the commute? Any amenities? Oh, did you manage to snag a floorplan?”

“Dungeons aren’t real estate, they’re not for sale! How do you keep confusing dungeons and condos? There are no amenities in a dungeon!”

No amenities, huh? I’ll lower my expectations.

“It’s the one near town, right? Might be too close to the forest?”

Using my Map skill through Jupiter Eye, I confirmed the location. It was right by one of the two villages that got destroyed by the rampaging horde of monsters led by an orc king. I wasn’t able to save those villages, and the people that lived there were all dead now.

No wonder they didn’t like the dungeon. Anything good about the area was wiped off the map.

That village was destroyed because no one knew that the orcs had left the depths of the forest and moved to the outskirts. I was the only person who noticed that orcs were on the move, but I didn’t realize that it foreshadowed an invasion. The people in those villages died as a result.

Some people in this world claimed I was some sort of hero, but I failed. Two whole villages worth of people lost their lives.

Thirteen of my classmates had also died, one by my own hand. I didn't save them either. I wasn't a hero.

Wiggle.

That was why no one ever mentioned those villages to me. That's why we took a longer route to the dungeon, to avoid the ruins. I could have saved them, but instead, I was off killing my own classmate. Countless people died because of me.

What kind of hero is that?

What kind of savior is that?

They shouldn't call me the savior of the town, or of the realm. I failed those two villages. *Don't give me your gratitude!*

Sure, I built a defensive wall for one village, and I obliterated the monster population in the forest and cleared the land, but that was too little, too late. The villages were gone and there was nothing I could do.

I didn't want to be treated like a hero. I wasn't worthy of praise just because I decided to help people now. I couldn't stop thinking about those who died. I deserved to be judged for my deeds. I didn't deserve forgiveness, but no one said anything. They were as silent as the dead.

Slimey bounced and wiggled frantically on top of my head, as if he meant to comfort me.

DAY 51

AFTERNOON

I mean it's way more vicious and violent than a demonic ogre, so of course if I show them I'll get a lecture?

A DUNGEON

WE ARRIVED at the next dungeon. It seemed pretty deep, probably more than fifty floors, but the entryway was in total disrepair.

"We finally made it, but we're way behind schedule," I said. "Three in one day is totally unreasonable! This is teenage boy abuse!"

"All you did in the last dungeon was walk around and read books."

This would probably be our last dungeon for the day. *Probably*. It would probably take until evening to clear this one, even before I factored in secret rooms.

"I remember the way! Follow me!" said Vice Rep A.

"Watch out for respawns."

I was expecting this dungeon to be easy. After all, three parties, each led by members of the student council, were able to quickly reach the 49th floor.

That meant that the likelihood of specialized or unique monsters was low, since the girls weren't adept at fighting those kinds of monsters. *Yeah, they're not particularly versatile fighters*, I thought. *But when given the chance, they're really powerful.*

"I'm charging in!"

"Whoa!"

Speaking of which, if I didn't hurry up, I wouldn't even get a chance to fight.

If we didn't finish this dungeon soon, I'd have to start doing my freelance

work, and then I wouldn't get any time off until morning.

"My expectations were low, but this is a solid *no* based on the crappy entrance alone," I said. "Let's get this over with. The walls are thin, the construction is crooked, and there's no sense of cohesion!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry it's not meeting your expectations!"

"Nothing tops the epic entrance for the Ultimate Dungeon, y'know? It would make for a perfect bathhouse, too."

"Didn't you make that entrance?"

"Yeah, you did unlicensed renovations on that first floor!"

Even the former ruler of the Ultimate Dungeon glared at me. Apparently, I wasn't supposed to just go ahead and make whatever renovations I wanted, whenever I wanted. At least I stopped before installing a hot spring.

All I did was make some *minor* alterations to the first floor. And then I fell into a pit! Besides, the former dungeon emperor deserved a grand foyer for her dungeon, right? Although she was retired now...

We split into three groups—the student council, the sports girls, and the dungeon rulers—and killed any respawning monsters as we went. Both Miss Armor Rep and Slimey certainly could have handled everything solo if they felt like it, so the groups were casual. They rushed to see who could one-shot more monsters first. Miss Armor Rep raced about with child-like abandon, while Slimey simply...swallowed monsters whole? *Slimey, you're going to get indigestion if you keep doing that.*

"No early secret rooms in this dungeon, at least," I said. "So, let's keep rolling. I want to go home and feed Slimey dinner! Don't eat too many monsters down here, they'll spoil your appetite."

Slimey jiggled in apparent understanding. Maybe Predation didn't alter his appetite. Predation was in his skill list, and it seemed to work similar to Hijack. Slimey used cheat skills with impunity!

"Servitude reset your level to 1, so we need to keep you safe, but these weak

monsters on the upper floors should be fine, right?”

“I think...eating...makes grow...faster,” said Miss Armor Rep.

“I guess that’s okay, then.”

Jiggle jiggle!

He’s definitely fine. The combo of head-on attacks from Miss Armor Rep and sneak attacks from Slimey was vicious. Even if you saw them coming you couldn’t escape, couldn’t defend yourself. It was an unstoppable coordinated onslaught.

“You don’t need to go ham on these low-level monsters,” I said. “Besides, I want a chance to fight, too!”

Miss Armor Rep simply nodded. Slimey jiggled.

Even their replies were coordinated!

Slimey’s movements were so unpredictable that I couldn’t find a way to cut in. I would’ve been scared to practice Dimensional Slash here. I tried to execute a Life or Death attack, but Slimey bonked into me from behind and wiggled with crimson frustration. I was supposed to be the master, but all my servants ended up bossing me around!

The two of them continued their gleeful rampage. They had spent what had to have felt like an eternity cooped up in the depths of their dungeons; I couldn’t blame them for wanting to blow off some steam. I had so much work to do that I was the only person who wished they were bored! No matter how much I swindled the girls, I still had no money! I had already spent my rent money, too...

We cleared the 17th floor, and had yet to find a hidden room. There was nothing to do besides killing respawned monsters, and that only took, like, a second, tops. *When will I get a turn?!*

Not like I wasn’t keeping myself busy; I was using Eidetic Memory and High-Speed Thinking through my Supreme Thinking skill to design mechanized looms in my mind. *If only I could figure out how to build a flying shuttle!* I had once looked at a schematic of the flying shuttle designed by John Kay, a luminary

from the Industrial Revolution. I understood the principle of the thing, but this was my first attempt at making one myself. Without experimentation, I couldn't settle on a design. Fortunately, Supreme Thinking ran through countless thought experiments for me, steadily refining the design. Still, there were elements I couldn't predict without making a real prototype. That was what I wanted to work on tonight.

"Boooooored," I moaned, dragging my feet.

Wobble wobble?

Meanwhile, the fantasy world agricultural revolution was well under way. The nerds had already implemented the Norfolk four-course system of crop rotation, eliminating the need to keep any fields fallow. They even memorized the processes for developing ammonia-based fertilizers and cultivating rice. We didn't even *need* to use the Norfolk four-course system. *Though this world's biome is more like Norfolk than Japan, I guess.*

"Those guys were way over-prepared for getting summoned to a fantasy world!" I exclaimed. "I already explained the principles of industrial agriculture to Mr. Meridad in my proposal, but now we can use that volume of *Country Living* from your dungeon, Slimey, to improve our animal husbandry. Larger herds should lead to more arable land, and that'll increase food production."

The nerds even knew everything there was to know about steam engines and railroads. The problem was they knew how to manufacture iron via foot treadle forge, but not modern blast furnaces. Why wasn't any of their knowledge geared towards modern society?

"Why are you already so chummy with a slime?!" the girls shouted.

Since I could generate power via magic, developing a spinning mule and a mechanized loom took priority. The nerds had absolutely no interest in clothes, so they hadn't bothered to learn anything about those machines. How could they ignore such foundational knowledge? During the Industrial Revolution, the textile industry was the star of the show!

What were they thinking?! Didn't these nerds learn anything practical?

And for some unfathomable reason, the only thing they knew about

architecture was how to make reinforced concrete!

“What kind of fantasy world did they expect to end up in? When would knowing how to build skyscrapers ever be useful? It’s medieval times over here!” I muttered.

Jiggle jiggle!

That’s right, Slimey, I thought. The nerds are too cringey to be human.

“Were you muttering something to the slime monster?” the Class Rep asked.

Metallurgy was another field of interest to those dweebs. *Serious interest.* From iron smelting to sword smithing, they knew how to forge anything from modern tactical blades to the legendary swords of Masamune. *How the hell did they learn that?* I once overheard the nerds talking to the bald weapons guy in town, and the breadth of their knowledge made that bushy-bearded man weep.

As a smith, he really should’ve been doing some actual smithing instead of just polishing wooden clubs all day. Could he really be called a blacksmith? Why did he like polishing wood so much, anyway?

Once everything was in place, the frontier would stand a fighting chance. Only then would I be freed from my side hustles. Even then, I would probably still be stuck cooking meals and making sweets forever and ever.

On the 38th floor, I found the first secret room of this dungeon, but the contents of the treasure chest were garbage: “Homing Bow: Homing Arrows, Attack bonus.” There were a few archers among the girls, but they already had cheat skills like Perfect Aim and Trajectory Prediction, so the Homing Bow was just redundant. I planned on selling it.

I found the following on the 44th floor: “Ring of Safety: Status Ailment Resistance (small).”

“The girls already have a ring with Status Ailment Resistance (large) for every finger on their hands. On top of that, the girls would not approve of this design.”

Slimey bounced in agreement.

“Do you have any idea how much work I put into my designs? They kept demanding alterations, corrections, redesigns! They were demons, I tell you! They picked apart me and my work, whether I made them accessories, clothes, or candy! They’d start a lecture going if I even showed them this ring, I can promise you that. I can promise you that!”

“Um, excuse me?”

“Ugh, get that hideous ring away from me!”

“Stop bullying the poor Ring of Safety,” I shouted.

Wriggle!

I finally got my own monster encounter on the 46th floor. The labyrinth forked into too many paths, so we split up. I finally ran into some monsters! *I won’t waste a moment killing them!*

Three knife-wielding marionettes, level 46 Mad Puppets, pranced menacingly toward me. *Is this supposed to be scary?* No modern person would be frightened by something this corny. *At least give me some flickering lights and spooky noises! Make it spooky!*

Instead, the puppets unceremoniously plunked down from the ceiling and lurched toward me.

“C’mon, you’ll need to do better than this!”

As the first puppet swung its knife at me, I slipped to the side and whacked it. The second one came down from above, so I spun around and landed a solid thwack with my staff. So cliché. The third puppet came at me from a blind spot on my right, so I batted the first two puppet corpses right into the third, knocking it dead.

An obvious strategy, right? I didn’t even need to move!

“One straight ahead, one from above, and one from a blind spot—it’s standard horror fare,” I told Slimey. “Sure, the knives were coated in deadly poison, but that didn’t add to the atmosphere. They could’ve at least played some creepy music to make it *feel* scary...”

Jupiter Eye meant I had no blind spots, so their strategy could never have worked. Their Terror skill just didn't stand a chance against the iron nerves of a modern horror fan. Honestly, it was almost funny. Just about the only one of us who would run scared was Fish Girl. At just that moment, I heard a piercing scream.

"That was terrifying!" the Fish Girl cried. "I walked into this room that had some puppets lying around, right? And then they started moving! They came to life and lurched and twitched at me! I could tell, those puppets weren't nice! I got so freaked out I incinerated them! It was so scary!"

What a surprise, she got chased around. Wailing the whole time, too.

"So...they just surprised you and you ran away from them?" I asked.

"I was so scared!"

"I can't believe you fell for that. The spooky puppet that comes to life when you're not looking—such a cliché! You should've seen it coming and just blasted them with fire before they could move! You've seen horror movies before, haven't you?"

She told me horror movies seemed like they'd be way too scary, so she never watched them. No wonder she didn't know. *But is that what fish people sound like when they scream?*

Jiggle jiggle jiggle!

Slimey literally bounced with joy. Until now, he had languished, starving, in the deep dark; he was happy to have a full stomach and a chance to move about.

Did that explain why Miss Armor Rep hadn't settled down yet? She looked like she was also having fun, so whatever.

DAY 51

AFTERNOON

She's a nudist because she doesn't want to waste clothing.

A DUNGEON

MASSIVE MONSTERS charged forth and smashed against our shield wall with a thunderous crash. This was the power of Shield Bash—one move was enough to stop them in their tracks. *What's that coming from the side?* I could see them swinging.

"I guess that's it?" I asked.

Slimey wiggled. He couldn't even say "yup"—not that I needed him to confirm. The air grew still, thanks to two unstoppable tanks.

I watched with growing curiosity. As one used a sword to block, the other stabbed with the edge of a shield; when the other parried with her sword, the first smashed the monster with her shield. Offense and defense freely swapped places—a continuous barrage of attacks that destroyed its target.

They were the ultimate duo even back in our original world. Their names were feared as the best in Japan.

"Go Twin Telephone Poles!" I cheered.

A cacophony of violence: the clang of metal, the thud of stone.

"That's not our nickname!"

"Twin *Towers*! Not telephone poles!"

"Huh? Since when? They totally called you the Twin Telephone Poles on TV. Y'kn—*Oww!* That hurts!"

"We would've burnt the TV station to the ground if that happened!"

They seemed unhappy with how they were portrayed on TV. Did the producers twist the facts, was that why they were so mad? *But I'm pretty sure*

even their fans at school were always shouting “Go Twin Telephone Poles!”

The Shield Squad, including Shield Girl, could use different weapons depending on what they faced—switching between swords, spears, axes, and hammers. However, they’d lately used swords to the exclusion of all else, except occasionally spears. I’d barely glimpsed a good hammer or a sharp axe on them. Maybe this was a signal that I should start making weapons?

“I think axes and hammers would be the ideal matchup for these enemies, or maybe a long spear or halberd so that you can fight with whatever range you want,” I suggested.

“Uh, I guess?” one said.

“Oh, let’s get a bow, too!” the other said.

If we were going to work together, we might as well turn our numbers into versatility. Our tactics were limited by our overreliance on swords.

I would have to seriously consider getting into weapon smithing when we returned. Setup would take some time, so I would need to get started right away. My never-ending night truly had no end...in other words, there was no end to my unpaid overtime! *So how come I’m still broke?!*

“We did it!”

“Good work!”

Jiggle jiggle!

The level 49 Rhinoceros Tanks were finally annihilated.

The armor-plated rhinos were stopped mid-stampede thanks to the teamwork of the Shield Girl and the pair of volleyball aces. Their strategy was effective: the rhinos had slashing resistance on their armored heads and backs, but that couldn’t stop a certain Archsage from attacking their flanks, flipping them onto their backs, and exposing their soft underbellies. It should go without saying that this Archsage used only physical attacks. *Something’s shaking!*

Then, they just pummeled the helpless rhinos to death. Slimey was especially enthusiastic. The Guardians all had their shields upgraded with mithril, giving

them maxed-out Impact Resistance and Magic Reflection. All they needed to do was charge in at top speeds to crush the enemy.

The rhythmic gymnastics girl Febreze Dancer, one of the few who knew the Alchemy skill, jumped in and bludgeoned a rhino to death with clubs. She was using some sort of alchemical weapon that could transform the club into a hoop, a ball, and a ribbon, but lately she was only using the hoop. How did that even work? Did spinning the hoop make the enemy dizzy or something? Was it a hypnotic attack?



In the next hidden room, I found the Power Glove. This one would be popular, especially after a mithril upgrade. I was only using small bits of mithril, so I was fine on supply for the time being, but I'd start running low eventually. *Can I find mithril anywhere outside of dungeons?* I wondered.

"Check this out: 'Power Glove: Power +30%, Defense boost.' Anyone want it? Maybe?"

Shield Girl and T-Twin A were playing rock-paper-scissors for it. They'd both use it plenty, but the Archsage would probably benefit the most. She said that she didn't need it, since she preferred equipment meant for magic users. This, despite her never having cast a single spell in combat.

"The 50th floor," I said. "Time for a boss fight? We fight, we win, we eat pork cutlets, yeah? Sounds good, right?"

"Cutlets!" the girls shouted.

"Was gonna make some aurora sauce, sounds good?"

"Oh dear," said Vice Rep B, "a thrill went down my spine just imagining that tangy ketchup and creamy mayonnaise stirred together into something as *decadent* as aurora sauce."

"And the soy sauce was looking a little lonely, so I also slipped a little of that in. As a treat, y'know? Yeah."

"Yay!"

They were psyched. *Maybe they'll tenderize the floor boss until it's a cutlet.* Would floor boss katsu taste good?

The answer: definitely not. I sighed. "Seriously? Paralyze Jellyfish, level 50. Mister Jellyfish does not have the gravitas of a dungeon boss!"

"We got this!"

A gargantuan jellyfish floated in midair. This could've been a cool piece of décor, but ultimately it was just annoying—too big.

"Guardians to the front, form two lines and sever its tentacles!" commanded

the Class Rep.

“Roger that!”

The shield wall repelled the tentacles while the second line of defenders dealt Slashing and Bludgeoning damage. And the rearguard...didn't exist. The Archsage was in the middle of the fray with everyone else, bashing the jellyfish with her staff. None of the attacks seemed to work, though.

Beautiful girls leapt through the air as they were attacked by...tentacles. If the nerds were here, they would've been in tears. They would've done nothing but watch. They might have even started rooting for the jellyfish.

Meanwhile, my demon scythes, which I definitely did not forget up until this moment, joined the tentacle hunt. *I'm glad I remembered them.*

“Wait, this isn't working. Looks like it's immune to physical damage,” I said. “And because of Magic Reflection, we can't use spells.”

“So, what do we do?”

Wriggle?

The tentacles were basically impossible to chop off, but even when we did, they regrew instantly. Bludgeoning had absolutely no effect.

“Well, obviously we need an attack that isn't physical or magical to defeat this jellyfish, y'know? That's what we need to do, right?”

“And *how* do we do that?!”

There was only one thing we could do.

Fish Girl backed away, drawing the attention of the tentacles, then Nudist Girl jumped out, trying unsuccessfully to sever any tentacles within reach.

“Atatatatata—aaaah!!!”

Oops, she got caught. *The nerds would be delighted.* It was fortunate they weren't here.

“Don't worry, you can resist poison and status ailments, so just hang in there and watch out for paralysis, okay? Your weapons won't get destroyed, so you don't have to worry about that, either. But it does have Dissolve, so you'll lose

your clothes, but since you're a nudist, you don't have to worry, okay? So, it's all good."

"I'm not a nudist! I don't wanna be naked!"

"No! It's not all good!"

"She didn't volunteer for this!"

Even Slimey bounced a little bouncy scold.

Okay, so she wasn't into it. Why not? She was a nudist who took off her clothes at every given opportunity. Why would she care about getting her clothes melted? *Oh! It's a waste of clothing! Of course!* She didn't want to burden me with more work!

"Will you help her already?!"

"We need to rescue her!"

"Don't worry, I've got the jellyfish under my control with Holding magic," I said. "It's under some heavy restraints, basically. I just can't get a grip on the tentacles." I shrugged.

"The tentacles are the problem!"

I closed the distance to the jellyfish and cut through the tentacles holding Nudist Girl using Dimension Slash...and crashed into the jellyfish. It was an accident, the result of barely being able to control Magic Entanglement and Life or Death, plus Dimension Slash adding too much chaos to the mix. I was kind of ensnared by the jellyfish's many tentacles. It was in my grasp and vice versa.

"Hey, what are you planning to do to a high school boy?!" I cried. "Boys aren't usually in these scenes! Save me! Why won't anyone help?! Why do you all look so smug?!"

Even Slimey gave a cheeky little jiggle.

I turned up the temperature with Heat and used Holding magic to wring out any moisture, then dehydrated it with a combo of Vibration, Alchemy, and Water magic. To put the nail in the coffin, I stripped it of its immunities with the right Spearshield Gauntlet!

“Dry up, wither! Desiccate! Now become jerky...and just fry a bit more, and... it’s done!”

“Huuhhhhh?!” exclaimed the girls.

Don’t “Huh?” at me! Cheer! Say something like “Yeahhh!” Why did nobody seem pleased?

“Nice, a spellstone and loot...the jellyfish was carrying something?”

It hadn’t looked like it was, but I examined the item anyway: “Infinite Tentacles: Create and control tentacles.” Uh, this wasn’t the type of ability humans should have. The nerds would like it, but that wasn’t any better. I *could* sell it with an outrageous markup, but that’s exactly *why* they shouldn’t have it, no matter what.

“He just dried the jellyfish out...and incinerated it...” said the Class Rep.

“It makes perfect sense and no sense at the same time!”

Jiggle!

I had now found the holy trinity of sex appeal-destroying treasures: the Submission Choker, Prometheus Chains, and Infinite Tentacles. *This is a disaster!*

“H-how did I end up with all this BDSM gear? This is an assault on my reputation! It’s been at death’s door this entire time, but nothing could survive this! No, it’s even worse than that, I haven’t even *seen* it anywhere!”

Why did this world go after my sex appeal with such ruthless accuracy? On top of everything else, tentacles? Miss Armor Rep literally went into hiding!

DAY 51

EVENING

The problem is that my ever-diminishing time is colliding with an ever-lengthening order list!

A DUNGEON

FOR SOME REASON, the girls put their heads together and decided I should hold on to the Infinite Tentacles.

They said that no human should ever possess such an item, much less a young woman. *Hey! I'm human! I swear, just check my status!*

"Look," I said, "I'm human! Look at my status! It says 'Race: Human!'"

Wiggle wiggle?

"Stop muttering to your slime," Vice Rep A said.

In short, it was not a proper item for girls, but it should never fall into the hands of any of the guys, which left me as the only candidate. They wouldn't let me pawn it in the marketplace either, claiming that it was too dangerous. They disregarded the real danger to my reputation! *I think I see it fading, far, far in the distance. It's on the brink of vanishing!*

Wiggle...

The girls huddled around Miss Armor Rep and began a girls-only meeting.

"First Vibration, now tentacles...good luck!"

"Have you considered...vibrating tentacles?"

"Eeee!"

"Just think of all the places those tentacles can go," Vice Rep B said innocuously.

"It's supposed to be tentacle control, but I don't think he'll be able to control

himself, you know what I mean?”

“Stop!”

The girls looked like they were having fun. What were they talking about? Why did they exclude me out of nowhere? Having a girls-only meeting when there were eleven girls, one guy, and one slime wasn't very nice. They were ostracizing me! I was an outcast!

Wiggle wiggle.

I hung out with Slimey instead. I wasn't lonely or anything. *Sniffle sniffle.*

Jiggle jiggle.

Slimey looked pleased when I patted him, so that was nice.

“Hello,” I said. “What are we doing? Heading down? Going back? Living here? Doing renovations? A sleepover?”

“We are *not* having a sleepover!”

“You won't be taking us somewhere isolated with your vibrating tentacles!”

“Yeah! Keep those things away from us! I won't get taken by surprise! No!”

The girls started screaming. I got the point, they didn't want to camp down here. No renovations, either. The girls' faces were bright red for some reason. It sounded like they wanted to go home, but something was clearly upsetting them. Some feminine mystery, I suppose.

Back at the inn, there was a standoff. The Poster Girl and Slimey stared each other down for a long time. Slowly, the girl reached her hand out. Slimey quivered and extended a wobbly tendril. *Is this how they shake hands? Is this E.T.?*

Then she began to strike poses and gesture with her limbs. Was this some incomprehensible form of communication? Was she doing a robot dance? *Why would a slime know the robot?!*

How mysterious. A slime doing the robot was already strange enough, but

then how could he move in such a mechanical fashion? Oh well, if they were having fun, then whatever.

“In conclusion, we defeated two bosses, so our work is two-thirds done,” I said. “But only one of them died, so half of it was more like a dungeon kidnapping.”

“You’re the one who started feeding it!”

“Objection! You’re the only kidnapper!” the Class Rep said, pointing a finger my way.

“What’s worse, you’re a repeat offender!”

“But it’s so *cute*! Cute is justice, right?”

Jiggle!

“Adorable!” Vice Rep C squealed.

“The culprit shows no remorse!”

Then our meeting began. We went through our after-action reports, shared intel and information, just talking, y’know? Discussions went pretty smoothly without the other guys around.

Out of nowhere, a nerd voice piped up, “Did you say something about tentacles? Gimme the deets!”

“Nerd—OMG, where did you come from?! And WTF is with that creepy grin? Read the room! The girls are literally backing away!”

No matter what the cost, I couldn’t let the nerds find out about Infinite Tentacles. *No joke.*

The nerds were obnoxious, so I beat them up while serving cutlets with aurora sauce, walking all over them as I delivered plates. The meatheads sat in silence, stomachs growling.

“Cutlets with aurora sauce,” I announced. “If we can’t have katsudon, we’ll have cutlets, am I right?”

“Just hand it over! Let’s eat!”

“Seconds, please!” the meatheads yelled.

I didn't make katsudon because I was low on eggs. I used most of them to make mayonnaise. But I might have made too much cutlet... I should sell the extra and recoup some costs.

"It's delicious; sweet and salty but not too much!"

Slimey jiggled.

Stalker Girl always cleverly managed to show up right when dinner was served. And any secrets she had to sell, she charged exactly what I was charging for a meal, too. She always helped clean up, so there really wasn't a problem.

She had tried to join in on the robot dance, but it was too difficult for her. She could hardly move after eating so many cutlets.

Slimey wiggled with delight after eating the pork cutlets. He ate so many during lunch, yet he still had a healthy appetite. Well, he enjoyed the meal, and that was good enough for me.

We all went our separate ways after dinner, so Slimey and I decided to take a bath. He couldn't stop jiggling in the bathwater. Afterwards, I went to my room and got to work. The never-ending night began. It sounded cool to say it that way, but it was just my side hustle.

"I'm only getting a trickle of money from spellstones, so crafting and cooking make up most of my income," I said.

Wiggle?

I had an unexpected surprise. These tentacles were *really* effective!

"Cool! Unlike Holding magic, these have an actual physical presence, so they're intuitive to use! I finished copying an entire manuscript in the blink of an eye!"

Slimey jiggled with approval.

Thanks to Supreme Thinking, I could control all my tentacles simultaneously and finish any task in an instant. They were damn good with a needle and thread, too!

“What an unexpected discovery! Still, my backlog of orders keeps growing without end. What? Who the hell requested that I make a school swimsuit? You can’t expect a teenage boy to do that! Nudist Girl?!”

The slime bounced nearer.

Nudist Girl was not only an exhibitionist, but also a member of the school’s swim team. Swimming was one thing, but why did she order a school swimsuit specifically? Didn’t she realize that it attracted nerds like flies to honey? She was playing with fire.

“I can’t make a school swimsuit! What the hell am I supposed to do about the measurements?! She wants Dissolve Resistance, too? Is she planning to go into battle wearing this thing?!”

Jiggle jiggle?

I had to admit, it would be hilarious to see the nerd reactions.

I thought about just throwing something together through trial and error, but that wouldn’t work. Not for a swimsuit. Why did she expect a teenage boy to stay up all night prototyping swimsuits?! *I won’t do that! Never!* Besides, I needed to continue researching prismatic clothing. Although, maybe I should make a prismatic swimsuit. *Wait, who would want that?!*

“Eureka! I’ve cracked the code on prismatic pigments! Now I won’t have to make a bunch of color variants! There’s so much work that if this was the fable of the Crane Wife, the crane would pluck its feathers completely bald to produce all this!”

I even had a magically powered loom and I still couldn’t keep up. A power loom I had to design myself, by the way!

The concept was simple. I needed to grind spellstones into a fine powder, and then rub that powder into wet thread or fabric. Then, I would just charge it with a bit of magic and presto, prismatic textiles. I only had to determine which grade of spellstones to use, and how many. It was going to be so worth it... setting aside that I was giving these prototypes away for free.

“The main effect is the ability to change color, but I suspect that if I use high-grade spellstones, it could even be useful in battle,” I said.

Slimey wobbled in anticipation.

Successfully crushing the spellstones was my first obstacle. I didn't need to make a superfine powder, but the grains at least needed to be a consistent size. Put plainly, it was a pain in the ass.

"I can make the spell dust change colors now, so all I have to do is apply it to some fabric and I should be good to go, right?"

Vibration and Alchemy should allow me to produce large quantities, but it was still a horribly tedious process. Once I had enough, I could start fulfilling orders for prismatic clothes. I was lucky to have more spellstones than I knew what to do with; grinding stones one by one would've taken forever.

"I think this is ready to go to market. The test fabrics are naturally tear-and stain-resistant."

The process was ridiculous, but being able to channel magic through the clothing was a huge benefit in terms of safety. These prototype jeans were nigh indestructible, so my experiments were paying off.

"As soon as the girls finish their meeting, I'll take measurements for the Class Rep's prismatic dress and try to make it. Sounds good?"

The slime wiggled an affirmative.

How long *was* their meeting, anyway? *Merely scheduling the next meeting probably takes them three whole days!*

Well, my strategy for producing the prismatic clothes was sound, but now I had a different problem. I was worried about the impact on my...appearance.

While I was experimenting with the possible uses of Infinite Tentacles, I kind of slotted them into my cloak. In other words, I looked like a teenager with tentacles writhing from underneath my black cloak.

At this rate, I'll get tossed into prison without a trial!

"I look like teen Cthulhu. This is going to be hard to explain."

Boing!

Was there any item more damaging to one's appearance? Not only would it

tank my sex appeal, but it would also max out my repulsive creep score.

“My tentacles are really gross-looking, too! Practical, but disgusting!”

My cloak looked like something out of the Cthulhu Mythos, not a fantasy world! If I saw someone else wearing this, I’d run for the hills! *It’s that creepy!*

“Even so, the tentacles were so handy to have around. I feel like we were workplace BFFs, y’know?”

Jiggle jiggle.

No one else wanted to help, after all. Not that they could’ve if they wanted to; they were still stuck in their eternal meeting. Should I check on them?

DAY 51

NIGHT

I'm pretty sure it's insalubrious for a healthy teenage boy to rub a teenage girl all over?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

INTERLUDE: GIRLS' MEETING

WE FINISHED OUR BATHS and started our girls-only meeting. After the monster horde from a few weeks ago had obliterated two villages, we had started to worry about Haruka-kun. Now we couldn't wait any longer to discuss our concerns.

We weren't sure how to help. What could we do for him? What could we say to him? Nobody knew.

"For once, he isn't at fault," said Fukunuki-san.

"He massacred the horde by himself, didn't he?" Chika-chan asked.

"He insists that he only fought orcs because they were in front of him," I explained.

He didn't need empty praise or encouragement. We told him plenty of times that he shouldn't blame himself. We could tell him countless times that he saved us, millions of times, billions of times. But that didn't make a difference.

"We've even told him that when we were trying to rescue him, he saved our lives instead."

"Yeah!"

I sensed that Haruka-kun was wrestling with some sort of unresolved trauma, but we couldn't figure out how to help—or if help was even possible.

Then, we talked about the Infinite Tentacles, an item that none of us wanted to be responsible for. Angelica-san looked like she was about to cry, even as her face blazed crimson. Her breathing was labored and deep. What was she imagining? *Not that!* I thought. *Please don't imagine that.*

“Way too many tentacles, it’s horrifying!”

“You said it,” Shimazaki-san added. “Makes my skin crawl!”

We all started to imagine what those tentacles could do—a wave of awkwardness passed through the room, leaving a sea of blushing faces.

“Good luck, Angelica-san! Tell us about it tomorrow!”

Of course we needed to hear what happened. Usually we talked about this kind of stuff in the bath, but people kept fainting. It was best if our meeting didn’t carry a risk of drowning.

“So, do you think that he can make those tentacles vibrate?” asked Vice Rep B. “Can you imagine? A tentacle going *brrr brrr brrr*?”

“Stop! That’s too much!”

“They’re his ultimate weapon!”

“Virtuous young women will go extinct!”

Haruka-kun always claimed that he only had trash skills, but he fought by combining them in incredible ways. On top of that, he was like a great sorcerer of crafting.

We were confident that he would use those tentacles in ways we couldn’t even begin to imagine. The tentacles were almost certainly meant to be used alone, but instead he’d definitely create some terrifying combo with them.

I couldn’t even contemplate the fate of poor Angelica. We definitely needed to call another girls’ meeting tomorrow to hear about— We heard a hesitant knock at the door, accompanied by a jelly-like bouncing sound.

It was Haruka-kun. Only he could make knocking sound like a question. How was that even possible?

“Yes?” I said.

“You know this meeting is for girls, right?”

“Trying to join in?”

“We might let you if you dress up like a girl.”

“Absolutely not!” he shouted from the other side of the door. “Look, Class Rep, I need to measure you. It’s for the prismatic dress. If your meeting doesn’t end soon, I won’t be able to take measurements.”

He says he won’t wear girls’ clothes, but—wait, did he say prismatic?

As if on cue, all the girls shouted, “Come in!”

Aren’t you all a bit too eager to invite him? We were all wearing loungewear, and Haruka-kun was still technically kind of a guy! He was far more likely to run away from us, terrified, than vice versa, but still.

“Uh, thanks, y’know? Look, I just need to take measurements. You had a hard time picking a color, so I was wondering if you wanted to make this dress prismatic, too.”

Yes! I couldn’t decide between white and blue. Black would be nice, too. I didn’t know if I could pull off red, but if it were prismatic, that resolved my dilemma. Why was Haruka-kun wearing his black cloak and full battle-gear right after taking a bath?

No, he wasn’t dressed for battle—no gloves or boots, and he was wearing something more casual...wait, were those jeans?!

“So selfish! Making jeans only for yourself? I’m adding a pair to my order!”

“Me too!” the other girls shouted.

“Wait a minute, this is just a prototype!”

Wiggle! wiggled the slime.

Eventually, he relented and added jeans to our orders. Even so, just a pair of jeans wasn’t enough! I’d been pining for a denim dress this whole time, but I figured it was an impossible dream in this fantasy world...but if he could make jeans, surely a denim dress was no problem!

“Make me a jean jacket, too!” another girl demanded.

“Yes,” Shimazaki-san said. “I approve! Don’t forget about denim skirts!”

“Now we’re talking!”

“Make me a pair of jean shorts!” Chika-chan added.

“Genius!”

“The motion is carried! No objections!” I said.

Even without any denim, all the girls were wearing shirts and short skirts this very moment. Haruka-kun didn’t know where to look; we had him cornered.

Time to get as many orders in as possible!

“We’ll scrape together the funds for the additional orders!”

“Girls need to feel cute! It’s built into our budget.”

“But I’m telling you, these are just prototypes—” started Haruka-kun.

“You sly devil, I saw you wearing cargo pants the other day! I want culottes!”

“Not fair, Haruka-kun! I want wide-leg pants, too!”

The demands of the pants party must be accepted. He had kept delaying making pants for us because skirts were easier, but he couldn’t make that excuse after showing up in a pair of jeans.

We’d waited for pants for such a long time. In all likelihood, Haruka-kun was just too embarrassed to measure our legs, so he kept putting it off. This was the inevitable result of our insatiable craving for pants!

“I deny all accusations,” he said. “These are still in development. I test everything out on my clothes first! It’s just a sample, y’know?”

“We want an invite to a sample sale!”

“A sample sale...why didn’t I think of that?!” he gasped.

Slimey boinged up and down.

He was making everything from scratch, so trial runs were forgivable, but tempting us with a sample sale? That was dangerous.

Haruka-kun was surrounded by teenage girls in revealing sleepwear, with no place to run. His eyes, unable to find a safe place to rest, kept darting around.

Were those shifty eyes really the same ones that caused the terror knights to cower in fear? He was making this too easy.

“I’m reserving my spot! Let me put in a pre-order!”

“Me too,” Vice Rep C said. “Don’t forget me!”

They crowded in, drowning him in requests and demands, until his eyes lost focus and he stared blankly, vacant and defeated.

“I’ll take on more debt!”

“I’ll do anything for denim! Anything!”

Resistance was futile as these new orders came flooding in. No one allowed him any reprieve. If it weren’t for Haruka-kun’s lifeless expression, this would’ve looked like a typical harem scenario. For such a massive pervert, he was actually very gentle and respectful, so we weren’t worried. That was why we weren’t prepared for what happened next.

“Argh! Fine! All right, this is never going to end, so I’m just going to take everyone’s measurements at the same time, okay? Try not to squirm too much, I don’t have full control yet. Well, I have perfect control, but I can’t modulate their strength well, y’know? Tentacle strength? Know what I mean?”

Tentacles shot out from under his cloak and wrapped around all of us.

It was pandemonium. Thousands of thin tentacles squirmed around us, taking simultaneous precise measurements before we realized what was happening.



He was too embarrassed to take down our sizes himself, so he let his infinite tentacles do it! Every inch of our bodies was measured by the wriggling, writhing tentacles.

“Wai—wha—no!”

“This looks—and feels—totally inappropriate!”

“A tentacle went under my clothes!”

“Oh my, they’re surprisingly soft. It feels kind of...*nice*.”

Despite the chaos, Haruka-kun simply stood in the middle of the room, nodding occasionally, cutting cloth with the help of some tentacles, which was passed on to other tentacles for fitting. Once the fit was confirmed, the cloth went to yet more tentacles that handled the sewing. The tentacles would periodically stretch the garments against our bodies to confirm the measurements before returning to add more stitching.

“Good enough!” Haruka-kun said. “Is anyone listening?!”

“The tentacles are too...too distracting. Oh! Oh my!”

Haruka-kun’s tentacles showed no signs of stopping as they sewed new clothing based on our direct measurements. They were expert bespoke tailors.

“This is insane!”

“Yeah! It tickles!”

The tentacles draped fabrics on us like we were dress forms, pinned them in place, cut them to pattern, and sewed them into completed, perfectly sized pieces. By the time we collapsed from exhaustion and embarrassment, we had mountains of new clothes around us. We were drowning in debt, but none of us could stop grinning.

We clutched our new clothes. This was a dream come true—the sort of dream a little girl never gives up—a closet’s worth of beautiful, custom-tailored outfits made by magic.

That is, aside from the tentacles. Their involvement turned the dream into a nightmare!

“Outfits just for me! I’m so happy!”

“How do you know so much about women’s clothing, anyway?”

“They’re so well made!”

“Ugh, tentacles!”

Despite it all, we were so happy. Scarred for life, but blissful, nonetheless. Not a single one of us had stopped blushing.

“I think I’ve lost my innocence...”

In conclusion, tentacles were a hazard to maidens. They would exterminate every last inch of our youthful naiveté.

DAY 51

NIGHT

Sweet on the sweet sales, hell no on the house sales?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

“**W**HAT WERE THOSE GIRLS thinking? Showing so much skin, practically throwing themselves at me!”

Wiggle wiggle?

“As flustered as I was, I think I made everything prismatic except the denim. Oh well, I’m charging extra for prismatic clothes, so it’s all good in the end.”

Jiggle jiggle.

It was probably their attempt to cheer me up and help me forget about the destroyed villages.

I wasn’t actually dwelling on the ruins of those villages. They were just being worrywarts. What happened, happened, and it was too late to change it. I simply didn’t want to forget.

“People lived in that village, and it’s gone because of my inaction. I don’t want to forget about my responsibilities, y’know?”

Jiggle?

I wasn’t bothered, I simply knew that there was no way to forgive myself for that loss of life.

“Anyway, the girls squirmed so much that I couldn’t stop the tentacles from constricting around their wiggling bodies and touching them all over in a pervy sort of way!”

My senses were linked to the tentacles, so I *did* feel everything. That’s why I told them to hold still.

“Their faces got flushed and their breath ragged. It was a really...charged

atmosphere, y’know? Too much for an innocent teenage boy, don’t you think?”

Slimey wobbled in agreement.

I’d done a rush job, but the results turned out well in my opinion. It was an almost religious experience, seeing those tentacles in action. *Not in a horny way!*

“I just panicked a bit when they started moaning and breathing hard. That’s why I hurried through the work. It’s just...the more they contorted and bent, the more I felt, y’know?”

Wiggle wiggle.

I wasn’t going to get any sleep, even though I cleared my docket of any clothing orders. I didn’t want to think about all the accessories and equipment I had to deal with.

“I can handle that with tentacles and Holding magic, too.”

I didn’t have to worry about running out of MP either, since I had that high-end MP battery in my item bag.

Slimey was fast asleep. I wondered if he was happy, if he had fun today. Was he having a pleasant dream? Was Slimey happy he got to tag along? I didn’t have any answers.

On the other hand, Miss Armor Rep never needed to sleep, nor did she need to eat. That didn’t stop her from stuffing her face every day and snoozing with a beatific smile on her face. I hoped that Slimey could find happiness out here. I just didn’t know the first thing about caring for a pet slime monster.

Miss Armor Rep had gotten swept up in the chaos of the girls’ meeting, collapsed in exhaustion, and fell asleep with everyone else. In her sleep, she held her new clothes and hat close.

Even if they woke up early, they would probably be excited to try on all their new clothes, so I wasn’t going to be interrupted for some time. That being the case, I went back to work, my never-ending unpaid overtime.

“The general store put in a ton of orders, too!” I lamented. “The proprietor marked all her orders as URGENT to boot! Of course, she put in another order for

the mushroom lunch combo! When will she realize that I'm not a restaurant?"

She always ordered mushrooms, too. How could one woman like mushrooms so much?

"Well, the tentacles could probably handle it pretty fast. Plus, everything they make is masterwork quality! I'll be able to modernize this city in no time!"

If I were feeling polite, I would describe the frontier as a humble and rustic realm. The reality was, it was a backwater. Why else would she order so many basic things like buckets, plates, and pots?

"What the hell, she ordered an iron wood-burning stove? Go to the damn blacksmith for that! Who orders all this stuff from the same person?! It's all 'urgent,' and on top of all that, she expects me to make mushroom bento boxes every single day! Since when did she start selling sweets? She just decided that I'd make them for her without a consultation!"

Not only that, but there were clearly inconsistencies between sales and inventory. She was just eating the sweets herself!

"You're eating too much candy! Seven boxes for three people? Which one of them ate the extra box?!"

Why did she sell off all the furniture I made to decorate the store?

"Whoa, that's a huge profit margin. Never mind, let's mass-produce furniture!"

Even so, she *sold* the sales counter...where did customers go to pay?

"Was she bagging groceries on the floor? Is she an idiot? Why didn't she wait for me to make her a new one before selling her only sales counter? She really ripped people off with this! That's my kind of thinking—let's make more furniture and swindle the world!"

This town was impoverished and declining before I got here. They had nothing. Wasn't it kind of absurd that a single person doing a little crafting could change everything? That made no sense!

"I should definitely mine some iron ore. There's an iron shortage in town, and I don't want to waste money buying it."

When would I be able to rest? I did write a schedule for myself. Well, I wrote “TBD” on a piece of paper, but it was the start of a schedule! A side effect of scamming the girls every day meant that we had to go make money in dungeons whenever I had any time off, too.

Slimey slept deeply, without so much as a jiggle in response to my ranting.

“Why the hell am I making buckets in a fantasy world?! Though I’ve already prepared my production pipeline for the task. What do I get from this bucket arrangement, anyway? What’s in it for me?! Nothing!”

Surrounded by buckets in another world, what a terrible premise! Wood magic and the tentacles did a great job though. Who needed this many buckets, anyway? Next, she wants baskets!

“Does the general store lady think I’m a carpenter? If so, why is she ordering lunch?! This tragic tale of interminable side gigs is never going to end!”

I once read that talking to yourself was a warning sign for mental illness. *If that’s the case, isn’t it cruel to tell a person with a mental illness to shut their mouth?*

“No one’s gonna stop me from grumbling to myself. It’s not like anyone can hear me. So yeah, I’m gonna keep talking to myself! Working in silence is boring! What does she need all these baskets for, anyway? Damn it! If I had been making these from the start, I could’ve been catching fish this whole time!”

Before I knew it, I had become a master crafter in another world. Having developed assembly line techniques, I could now mass-produce what I wanted. *This is the inspiring tale of the owner and sole employee of a fantasy world sweatshop!*

“I should’ve realized that Wood magic made fishing possible from day one! I can’t believe I spent so much time eating mushrooms while staring hungrily at fish!”

It was an obvious event flag, and I didn’t know how I missed it.

Next up, I had to fulfill a massive stack of orders for women’s clothing and a smattering of orders for men’s clothing. Even in a fantasy world, men’s fashion

was an afterthought. The men's section in the general store was as tiny and shabby as could be.

"Men don't buy clothes, she says. It's a damn store! Sell clothes people want to buy! Don't just dedicate a tiny corner of the store to selling garbage!"

No matter how much work it would take, I decided to make more men's clothing. Why couldn't I think of anything to make besides jeans and cargo pants? *Men really don't buy clothes!* If it were up to me, I would only own a single pair of prismatic pants. *Laundry would be an issue, though.*

"The other stuff is fine. I'll mass produce it and build up some extra stock. I'll keep working in my solo sweatshop until the town's economy develops a bit more. Why do I have to make lunches every day, though? Go ask a restaurant!" At this point, I was putting the finishing touches on an extra-large mushroom bento box. "Why is it always mushrooms? She's too obsessed with mushrooms. No matter how rich the town becomes, no one will ever open a mushroom-only restaurant! It's too niche! She'd be the only customer!"

All complaints aside, my item bag from the Villager A set preserved anything I put into it for a very long time, if not forever. I didn't know if time was stopped inside that bag or what, but the contents were always perfectly fresh. That was why I decided to mass-produce her lunches. If I had any extra, I could always give some to Slimey.

Thanks to the tentacles, my assembly line was faster than ever. I felt like I had been at it for ages, but in reality, very little time had passed.

"I think time passes slower for me, now."

Supreme Thinking gave me High-Speed Thinking and Parallel Thinking, which allowed me to use tentacles and Holding magic to manufacture anything I wanted in the blink of an eye.

"I've become a perfect one-man factory; this really is mass production! I'll get rich off this!"

I built a surplus of the requested furniture and a ton of new products, as well. Next up was the sewing and the weaving.

I was renting a four-person room, but even with the extra space it was getting

cramped. I started putting the finished products into my item bag. Raw materials came out of the bag and finished products went in. In other words, that bag was both the start and end point of my magical assembly line. This was an entire industrial sector compressed into one single room, and one single side job!

“Looks like I’ll be able to finish by the time Miss Armor Rep gets back. This is really speeding up! These tentacles are so useful!”

They worked at unimaginable speeds.

I decided to upgrade the tentacles with mithril. When I checked its status, the item now read: “Infinite Magic Hands: Create and control tentacles and magic hands. Alter shapes and properties. Hardening. Weaponization.”

“Magic Hands? Did the tentacles become hands? Finally, I have a helping hand!”

The tentacles were already a big help, so I could only imagine what infinite hands could do. Unfortunately, I was now running very low on mithril.

I better test these hands out, I thought. At that moment, Miss Armor Rep returned. *Perfect timing! I’m going to test these Infinite Magic Hands to my heart’s content. Unlimited hands means unlimited pleasure!* It was time to find out just how limitless unlimited really was!

You see, as a teenage boy, all that time I spent pawing at my classmates with my writhing tentacles had left me with a particular problem. I couldn’t wait anymore, I had to try these babies out.

“Time to practice, to experiment! I can’t help myself—it’s not my fault! I swear! I swear! I double-swear!”

Surely, you don’t need me to tell you that she was incredibly exasperated with me the next morning.

DAY 52

MORNING

I opened my eyes, and without realizing it, production was complete.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

THE PLAN FOR TODAY was to resume yesterday's jellyfish dungeon. Despite this, the girls called an impromptu meeting in the middle of breakfast. They were whispering, giggling, and shrieking over God knows what.

They surrounded Miss Armor Rep, who was trying to tell them something in a series of stilted words and gestures.

"The tentacles?"

"Like fingers?!"

"Vibrating caresses?!"

"They transformed?!"

"In a sexy way?!"

Girls just like to socialize, don't they? I figured Miss Armor Rep was happy to talk so much. She had been all alone in the Ultimate Dungeon, had probably given up on dreaming all together. I was just happy that she could smile and laugh.

Slimey jiggled with glee as he devoured bread and stew. On the other side, the Poster Girl and Stalker Girl stuffed their mouths with bread, squealing and laughing with cheeks as full as chipmunks.

Miss Armor Rep looked happy, too. Anything was better than the isolation at the bottom of a dungeon. I didn't like the idea of her having to earn money for her food expenses; I would rather her just eat to her heart's content—she only started eating for the first time recently, after all.

“I suppose she’d save money if she made her own meals...I am ripping everyone off with these prices. Still, it’s not easy to serve a varied menu with so few available ingredients!”

I wanted to go on a shopping trip throughout the domain, but I needed to save up some money for that. I didn’t want to keep the frontier isolated forever. If trade stagnated too much, it would be a death knell for the frontier economy.

As it stood, I had rejiggered the pseudo-dungeon so that members of Stalker Girl’s clan could pass through with the help of high-level adventurers. That way, trade in spellstones and mushrooms could continue in a limited fashion. Unfortunately, there weren’t many adventurers at a high enough level, and they could only escort small groups.

I could’ve altered the pseudo-dungeon to permit merchants to pass, but I didn’t want to give them a monopoly on trade.

The economy depended on the domain’s negotiations with the kingdom, but we couldn’t just sit back and wait. After all, I was running out of rice and soy sauce!

For now, I wanted to make sure that the duchy was self-sufficient in every other way. A strong economy was a powerful weapon, after all. If the frontier faced iron, wheat, or cloth shortages, the kingdom could exploit that weakness. That was why self-sufficiency was essential. I had the technology to mass-produce textiles, but the region didn’t have enough wool-producing livestock at the moment to provide the raw materials.

“I already found some iron ore deposits, so all I need to do is excavate some mines. There isn’t a lot of variety in food, but in terms of volume, we’d be self-sufficient soon.”

Currently, we maintained a monopoly on spellstones and mushrooms, which we could use to pressure the kingdom during negotiations. The only other option left to them would be military force, but no army could break through the pseudo-dungeon—the traps would decimate their forces.

In the end, they would have to negotiate. Before that could happen, we had to establish a self-sufficient frontier.

Wealth meant strength, and we needed wealth to avoid getting exploited. Right now, we lacked enough workers and livestock.

“Hey, Haruka-kun! We’re heading out!” the Class Rep called. “Why are you making so many buckets? Do your side job at night, okay?”

What? Was I making buckets this entire time? I made buckets without even thinking. Whatever, I would just sell them, and give any surplus to the inn since they treated us so well.

Besides the name, it was a good inn. They never complained, no matter how many monsters I brought back. They all just showed up on my bill.

“They should advertise that the former dungeon empress and a dungeon king chose to stay at this inn! No, wait, that wouldn’t work. It would only attract monsters and make this inn a destination for them!”

“Earth to Haruka! Hello? Are you coming or not?”

“I certainly am, aren’t I? Sorry, Poster Girl, Slimey is coming with me too. Can you please put him down?”

Wriggle wriggle.

The Poster Girl looked distraught as Slimey jiggled free from her grasp. I supposed that I could’ve let her look after him while I was out, but I wanted the emotional support.

“Where are we gonna get rich today?”

“If we go back to yesterday’s dungeon, there should be a dungeon king somewhere below the 50th floor,” said the Class Rep. “If there’s more than sixty floors, we’ll probably have to face more mid-bosses. We’re going to start finding more secret rooms, too, which will eat up a lot of time.”

“Should we finish that dungeon or start a new one?”

“Maybe we can split up and do both?”

“What do you think, Haruka-kun?”

Since the student council and the athletics club were a part of our group, the other groups lacked powerful members, so they were having trouble getting

through the middle levels of their own dungeons.

“Miss Armor Rep, Slimey, and I can handle the rest of yesterday’s dungeon ourselves. Let’s go deal with a new dungeon, okay? The other groups need more help and all, y’know?”

I had some suspicions about the jellyfish dungeon.

“That works, but isn’t that too dangerous?”

“There shouldn’t be too many more floors. Besides, a small group can move faster, right?”

With just the three of us, we could rush through. We couldn’t take a hit, so we weren’t suited for normal battles anyway. A small group was much better at stealthily picking off monsters along the way, our specialty.

The floors below the 50th were unexplored, so they would have far more monsters, too. Besides ambushing them, we could blitz through the weaklings... not that we had any other strategies.

“Trying to do something stupid dangerous again, aren’t you?”

“I’m not sure about this. Why are you always throwing yourself into harm’s way?”

“Even if it’s faster, it’ll be way more risky! Why do you never listen?”

“It still works out perfectly every single time, though.”

“Even though he’s only a level 19, somehow I’m worried about the poor dungeon king...”

They were right. My level still hadn’t gone up. It had taken me a long time to get to level 10, so this level wall would take a while to scale.

“Fighting is the real dangerous and time-consuming part,” I said. “We’ll just ambush monsters and one-shot them with surprise attacks. There’s nothing to worry about, y’know?”

The girls looked at each other with concerned expressions.

“This is definitely not safe, yet somehow you’ve persuaded me,” said the Class Rep.

Jiggle jiggle!

The meatnerds had left earlier. On our way to the third dungeon, we made plans. While the student council reported on the conquered dungeon, I went to the bulletin board. My usual morning ritual. I even did this yesterday, though I'd been sleepwalking at the time, so I couldn't remember. I didn't even remember getting my daily helping of glares!

"I can tell without even looking that there are no new jobs on the board! It's eternal, unchanging! Some of these notices look like they're ready to crumble from age! They're fossils! Why do I come here every day if it's the same, always the same?!"

"Back again? You're not even a licensed adventurer, yet you're here more than real adventurers! You still showed up yesterday, even though you were asleep! You even mumbled, 'No new requests...zzzzzz,' in your sleep! Your eyes were closed! Why do you keep coming here? Only adventurers can take those jobs! You're not even trying to be sneaky anymore, you're swaggering in here like you own the place! People are calling you the Boss of the Board! Can you please try to keep a low profile?"

I basked in her frigid glare while waiting for the others to return. An essential part of my morning nutrition! *If I'm the Boss of the Board now, would I get crowned King of the Board when I get promoted? A long journey to becoming Emperor of the Board, regardless.* The bigger problem was, at this rate, the board would never get updated. Why did it even exist?

The girls returned.

"Sorry for the wait!"

"We finished our report. We can go now—hang on, are you complaining about the quest board again?"

"Even if there was anything good, you couldn't take it since you're going to the dungeon today, anyway."

"Why are you so obsessed with it, anyway?"

“Do you want it? You can’t take it home. You’ll only get lectured. Oh, you’re already getting lectured?”

If the board came with the head receptionist glaring at me, I’d take it, but otherwise, why would I want this? At this point, I felt like I had the thing memorized—it hadn’t changed in a month!

I delivered my goods to the general store and gave the owner a slapstick thwack with an oversized paper fan and a stern talking to while I was there. Not like my words had any effect, as there was a stack of new orders waiting for me whenever I stopped by. Despite the repeated smacks, she remained totally intent on devouring her mushroom lunch. She was a serious mushroom addict.

“How could you *sell* your sales counter? Did you spend the rest of the day doing business on a stack of crates?”

Wiggle wiggle.

Slimey enjoyed wandering around town. He looked longingly at some jerky, so I bought some. Slimey bounced up and gulped it all down whole. If he liked it so much, then I would stock up later.

“Be careful out there,” the gatekeeper called as I left. These so-called gatekeepers did nothing to stop dungeon emperors and bosses from passing. What exactly would they keep out? Finally, we made our way to the dungeon.

All the girls looked exhausted this morning. Had they become nocturnal or something? Their eyes were completely closed, but they seemed to have no problem navigating with Presence Sensing!

“Leveling up your Presence Sensing this much might not be a great idea at night.”

Vice Rep A groaned, “We know!”

“At least we can use it to walk!”

“The path is straight, so it’s fine.”

From what I overheard this morning, the girls’ Presence Detection had upgraded to Presence Sensing. Their Vibration skill reached maximum level,

too. Their Enemy Tracking wasn't leveling up as quickly for some reason. What were they trying to detect and vibrate? Were they trying to work out the knots in their shoulders?

"So, what were the guys wearing, anyway?"

"Was it some kind of uniform?"

"Did you make it matching on purpose?"

"Oh that. I asked the guys if they wanted me to make them anything," I said, "and they told me that they wanted something durable, easy to move in, that didn't show dirt, and had a ton of pockets. It looks kind of military, doesn't it?"

I made imitation camo M-65 field jackets, dark cargo pants and black boots for them. They looked like modern-day mercenaries in a world of swords and sorcery—it was totally inappropriate!

"Ooh, camo could be cute!"

"Yeah, in some exciting colors!"

"I kind of want it, too."

The girls glanced at each other.

"We *need* to make money today!"

Are you serious?! I'd just figured out prismatic clothes, and now they wanted patterns. They did enjoy trying on all their new clothes this morning, and there was nothing wrong with a bit of glamour. Not like they could've eaten breakfast in full armor, anyway.

"Here we are, the third residence," I pointed out.

"It's a dungeon, not a condo!"

"The monsters here are mostly beast-type, right?"

"And there's lots of them, so keep an eye on your MP use."

Boing?

The best strategy for dealing with beast-type monsters was probably to set out poisoned food, but Slimey might eat it by accident, so that wouldn't do.

Besides, the girls needed to level up a bit more and get some more real battle experience before their next boss battle.

All that sparring with Miss Armor Rep ought to have taught them some of the nuances of combat by now. They'd been getting by on cheat skills, but they needed to learn how to fight properly.

I still can't believe they tried to fight that jellyfish like it was a regular monster.

DAY 52

MORNING

Apparently the source of the trauma is the same thing that caused their sleep deficiency. Something dangerous to maidens?

A DUNGEON

THE GIRLS WERE HORRIFIED—their eyes widened, color drained from their faces. Terrified not by the monsters but by me! Why did they look so creeped out while I was fighting over here?!

“Ahhh! Those tentacles!!”

“He’s like Vlad the Impaler, reborn!”

“The tentacles are terrifying in a whole new way!”

“They’re slithering and wriggling without mercy!”

Why were my tentacles so unpopular? Well, they were Magic Hands now... were they traumatized by yesterday’s events? Miss Armor Rep seemed especially traumatized. She cowered behind the other girls.

“This is just the result of my extreme care and caution! I have to always protect everyone perfectly, y’know?”

Jiggle jiggle!

We were ambushed by level 18 Ground Hungers on the 18th floor, but my tentacle strategy wasn’t getting the best reviews for some reason. How else was I supposed to deal with creepy six-armed gorilla beasts that jumped out of the ground and tried to hug me? *Not a fan.*

“Skewering them like that is just merciless and cruel!”

Slimey, Miss Armor Rep, and I were tagging along, but this was supposed to be training for the girls...but the stone-fleshed gorillas went for me first! I ended up snatching them all in my tentacles and stabbing them to death with a new

little technique I picked up.

“We fought hedgehog monsters on an earlier floor, remember? So I tried out the weaponization property of Magic Hands to see if I could cover myself in quills like a hedgehog...the ground hangers shouldn’t have tried to hug me, okay?”

They didn’t even ask permission. Rude.

“The way you killed them was appalling!”

“It was painful to watch!”

Now they were bullying my tentacles! *My sweet wriggly babies!*

“Don’t call my cute widdle tentacles scary! They’re good, hardworking tenta-buddies! All the made-to-order clothes from yesterday wouldn’t have happened if not for them! They measured you all with such care! Every millimeter of your bodies! Y’know?”

“That’s most of the reason why we hate them!” Shield Girl shouted.

“I couldn’t sleep last night because of them!”

“They’re a threat to our innocence!”

They turned to glared at me, eyes wet with tears. Another day, another dollar.

“You all had so much fun with your prismatic fashion show this morning, right? These sweet tenta-cuties made that possible, so stop harassing them. And since I control them, it’s like you’re bullying me by proxy! Don’t you feel bad for me at all? For real? You’re gonna make me cry, y’know?”

“That’s exactly what you deserve!”

Since the girls now had Presence Sensing, they were able to pinpoint and exterminate monsters. Besides some monsters that hid underground, they had it handled. *Is this the meaning of girl power?*

I didn’t sense any hidden rooms, so we simply killed the monsters in our path as we descended the dungeon. No serious battles, the girls just slaughtered their foes with one-sided shows of force.

They were unstoppable when they were in the zone, but easily overwhelmed when they weren't.

The girls were all incredibly specialized in either offense or defense, so they didn't adapt well to unexpected circumstances. If they could execute a strategy, they did fine, but they couldn't improvise. The guys were the exact opposite, just doing whatever they felt like in the moment.

"I think you might all be a little too...over-prepared? Your strategies and formations are kind of stiff, y'know?"

Miss Armor Rep nodded. Slimey jiggled.

"Strong, but...n-not...safe," Miss Armor Rep added.

Wiggle wiggle.

The nerds were almost lazy, how they cheesed their way through battles, and the meatheads improvised, their minds too limited to conceive of "tactics."

The girls, on the other hand, were a force to be reckoned with when things went according to plan, and hopelessly weak when something unpredictable happened. They didn't know how to adapt to changing circumstances. Their power was incredible, but fragile.

They needed to learn from Miss Armor Rep; the way she fought monsters was by deflecting their strengths and slipping through to strike their weaknesses. If she couldn't overwhelm them, she could use their power against them. Whether she was defending or attacking, she always landed her blows. That was why she was a master of battle.

I learned this the hard way, as she beat the tar out of me every morning. I tried using Magic Hands to fight with eight swords at once, but she held her own with just one blade! She didn't just block my attacks, she parried and riposted, cutting the hands to ribbons. *How is any of that possible?*

"You need to teach them more than just your techniques. They need to learn how you think about fighting, y'know?"

Miss Armor Rep nodded. Slimey jiggled. On second thought, I didn't think it was possible for them to learn her techniques, so they would need to focus on

learning her strategies.

“We’re having a great run,” the Class Rep said. “Let’s keep at it!”

“Yeah!”

They were full of energy. The book club group had previously reached the 49th floor, so we weren’t encountering too many monsters. I didn’t expect any trouble.

“Eyaaagh! Help!”

So much for that.

The girls couldn’t push through with a strong offense, but when they tried to switch to defense, their formation broke. It was pandemonium. They should have started just attacking the monsters on their own, but they were trying—and failing—to repair their formation instead. *Did Miss Armor Rep just face-palm?!*

“The least you can do is help ’em out, right? You too, Slimey, go bounce around, okay?”

Jiggle!

The girls excelled in tactical warfare and totally fell apart in a melee. Without the Class Rep’s leadership, they couldn’t coordinate.

“Fortify the defenses!”

“But which ones?!”

“What do we do?!”

The Infinite Magic Hands might have been as infinite as the name implied, but I could only control so many at once.

The enemies were birds—level 35 Vanish Eagles. Eagles would have been cool, but these had featherless, bald heads, like vultures. They periodically vanished as they flew around, often escaping death by winking out. The girls, unable to finish the monsters off, kept getting surprised by counterattacks. Maybe they vanished their head-feathers by accident.

An ability like Vanish made formations worthless. A normal battle against

them was impossible.

If I didn't need to chase the eagles in the air, I wouldn't need such tight control over the tentacles, so I wouldn't be limited by how many I could command at once. At that realization, I sent out countless tentacles, reshaped into razor-sharp threads crisscrossing over our heads. The eagles that flew into single strands stopped beating their wings as they were sliced in two, while others flew into viciously sharp lattices of thread and became mince.

"What is happening?!" the Class Rep shouted.

Even if these were flightless birds, the girls still would've had problems because of the Vanish ability. It was good that Vanish only caused them to blink out of existence for a few seconds at most; if it was indefinite, my trap wouldn't have worked.

"They can't stop mid-flight, so they can't help but dice themselves flying through my trap, y'know?" I said. "Their weakness is traps; chasing after them is a meathead-level stupid strategy."

"Don't you dare lump us in with them!"

"We couldn't have possibly built a trap like that on our own!"

"Well...thanks, I guess!" the Tiny Animal said.

"It's not my fault I can't fly..." complained Shield Girl.

"Their speed is bad enough, but being able to vanish like that was a nightmare!"

"They kept pecking me! It hurt!"

"Yeah! They kept diving straight at my eyes!"

"How dare they?!" Vice Rep A said, shaking her fist. "To target the pretty eyes of young maidens is unforgivable!"

"You ugly bald bastards!"

If the old man from the weapons shop heard what they were saying, he'd weep bitter tears. He was as bald as the vanish eagles.

"You shouldn't rely entirely on your formations. You have to use your magic

skills and exploit weaknesses, y’know? There are a lot of monsters that you can’t beat by just wailing on ’em. Miss Armor Rep can do that because she’s insanely good, but none of you are on her level. That’s why you have so much trouble when your formation breaks.”

“It’s true,” the Class Rep conceded. “We had trouble with those exploding bats, too.”

“You gotta learn to adapt to your enemies.”

Their main magic wielder, a certain soft-spoken Archsage, chose to smash everything with her giant hammer instead of casting any spells. Was it possible that the Archsage was a melee class?

“I know it’s a problem, it’s just...I can only focus on one thing at a time!” the Class Rep said.

Vice Rep A agreed. “Indeed. When I fight with my sword, I forget about magic, and vice versa.”

“The big issue, I think, is that your dedicated magic-user keeps ditching the rearguard to fling herself into battle, know what I mean?” I said.

“Oh dear,” said Vice Rep B, “but it would be far worse if I were useless without my offensive spells, don’t you think? Where’s the fun without getting a bit physical?”

Phrasing aside, she wasn’t wrong. The nerds combined skills and magic freely, making them effective in battle, but they were unathletic and fought with poor form. Being nerds, they were always terrible at physical exertion.

Along with Miss Armor Rep and Slimey, Vice Rep B didn’t take a scratch, so maybe there was something to focusing on individual technique. But even if it was impressive, it was a useless sort of achievement for a backrow combatant.

“How did you do that anyway?” the Class Rep asked me. “I didn’t sense any spellcasting, but bird chunks were suddenly falling from the sky!”

“Oh, those were just my tentacles, y’know? Or rather, my Magic Hands.”

“Seriously?!”

Simply a net to catch birds. If they couldn’t see it, they couldn’t dodge it.

“I turned them into razor-sharp wire and strung them up over our heads. Aren’t my tentacles the best? So stop bad-mouthing them, okay?”

“An evil tentacle trap!”

“They’re inescapable!”

Jiggle jiggle?

Why were the girls so freaked out over my tentacles? Why was everyone suddenly blushing and looking away? Even Miss Armor Rep hid behind the other girls. *They’re just my friendly Magic Hands. Don’t you remember them from last night?*

As incredible as Magic Hands were, I still had a lot of difficulty controlling them, even with Supreme Thinking.

They were even more of a challenge because I was moving around using Teleport at high speeds in combat. I could hardly control Teleport in the first place. Teleporting *while* using Magic Hands was impossible to predict, let alone control. Even I was baffled by them, and I was the one doing it.

“After we clear a few more dungeons, it would be a good idea to spend more time on training,” I said. “Overcoming weak points and learning new fighting styles, y’know? A drill sergeant can whip you all into shape, y’know?”

“You mean training with Angelica-san!”

“It’s not a terrible idea?”

“Uh, no.”

Real combat experience was the best training, but it didn’t help improve fundamentals. Fighting in groups meant the girls didn’t improve their solo skills, and it was still too dangerous for them to go it alone in a real battle.

I was the other extreme—unable to join groups and focused entirely on solo techniques. In fact, other people were only liable to get hurt if I lost control of my abilities. Miss Armor Rep and Slimey could just dodge my attacks, but my classmates were in danger if I used any of my best techniques.

“Though we should certainly grind some new weapon skills.”

“Yeah...and learning to solo could be a lifesaver.”

“Ugh, but I’m so bad with spears...”

“Using only swords limits our options too much.”

“We need more shield users. I can’t be the only one in my party,” Shield Girl said.

“That makes sense. We should get some proficiencies in buckler at the least, right?”

I was struggling to follow their rapid-fire conversation. Was this some girls-only chat skill? Regardless, at this rate, I’d be left far behind my classmates in stats. And I couldn’t form groups because I was a Loner, so I couldn’t benefit from fighting with others—I couldn’t even benefit from conversing with them.

It was more efficient for me to work alone, but I had to make sure that I didn’t cause collateral damage. I accompanied the girls to seek out hidden rooms and treasures, but we would get in each other’s way during a boss fight—doubly so for a dungeon king.

“Anyway, let’s keep going!”

“Yeah!”

Slimey bounced in agreement.

If a Boss’s level matched the number of the floor we were on, it wouldn’t be such a big deal, but Slimey was level 100 when we fought. That meant that he was emperor-tier. It was an understatement to say that we were fortunate to make Slimey our ally. Fighting him would have been like fighting Miss Armor Rep going all out. I couldn’t afford to hold back in a serious battle like that.

My skills were just as much a danger to my classmates as a dungeon king. They couldn’t understand, having never seen me go all out on a final boss before. Judging from the spellstones we’d found so far, I figured this boss would be level 50 or so, which was probably weak enough that we could handle it together.

But a level 100 boss, something as powerful as Slimey, was way too dangerous. We were lucky that Slimey had become weak from hunger. If Slimey

could've mustered the energy to cast magic, we would've been screwed. Even if I had tried to protect everyone, someone could have died.

Fortunately, Slimey was only trying to have us as a snack, so things were resolved pretty quickly. If he had really wanted to kill us, he might have succeeded. That's how powerful a level 100 was. But little ol' Slimey was just playing around, y'know?

Wiggle wiggle.

Though Slimey was currently frolicking, wiggling, wobbling, and dancing, he could keep up with Miss Armor Rep. *Not something I want as an enemy.* It was possible that there were more level 100 bosses, and I didn't know what I would do if they were as cute as Slimey.

I turned to the girls. "If the dungeon king happens to be level 100, you need to retreat. Even if something happens to me, you have to run. I'm serious."

The girls glared at me, their eyes shining with tears, but it was what it was. I knew they were worried, but the risk was too great.

"That's probably for the best," Class Rep replied, "since our group has so many weaknesses."

Boing boing?

Shield Girl was my exact opposite; whereas I'd die in a single hit, she could take a hundred. On the other hand, I could dish out more than one hundred blows without getting hit. Also, an enemy I could one-shot would take her a hundred blows. On top of that, I attacked a hundred times faster.

I'm a weakling, there's no changing that. However, my opponents were just as fragile. *The first to hit, wins.*

"Okay, we promise to retreat."

"But don't do anything too reckless! You too, Angelica and Slimey!"

"Don't...worry. We'll be...fine," said Angelica.

Jiggle jiggle!

Using Magic Entanglement to imbue Dimensional Slash into Life or Death, I

could render an enemy's defenses, vitality, and resistances meaningless. All I needed to do was land the first blow. *First to arrive, last to survive.* This reduced the variables down to luck...and skill. Against a level 100 dungeon king, I would have to bring everything I had.

It was fine, though, because the dungeon emperor, before she quit her job, was so powerful that an ordinary level 100 dungeon king was below her notice. She was unbeatable. Consumed by darkness, she could've destroyed the entire world.

When we fought in the abyss of the Ultimate Dungeon, she didn't use more than ten percent of her power. No, even five percent was too high an estimate. She didn't need more than one percent of her strength to wipe the floor with me every day!

Even now, Miss Armor Rep probably harbored all that power inside her. That pure, perfect strength, swallowed up in the darkness—never mind destroying the world, her power easily surpassed the gods. I knew for a fact that she could wreck that miserable old geezer from that white place. *If only I could summon him...*

Level 100 dungeon kings were potential emperors. They needed to be killed, but it was incredibly dangerous. I had the best chance of killing them—but I also had the greatest chance of getting killed.

And we couldn't just let the dungeons sit there, either. *That's why I keep going...that and the money!*

DAY 52

LATE MORNING

Three heads aren't necessarily better than two.

A DUNGEON

ONCE MY CLASSMATES reached levels in the mid-90s, they were much slower to gain new levels. It probably took a staggering amount of experience to go from 99 to 100, but reaching that level would almost certainly make one exponentially more powerful.

Monsters capped out at level 100, but humans could hit levels even higher than that. By that point, a person could probably take on the dungeon king head on. If so, they didn't need to take huge risks—they could become far more powerful, stronger than any monster.

"Loose formation!" the Class Rep commanded. "Surround the enemy!"

"Roger!"

Jiggle!

For me, level didn't mean anything. I didn't use my stats to fight in the first place, and I certainly had no hope of reaching level 100 in my lifetime. I had wiped out all of the monsters in the forest. Even killing a goblin emperor was only enough to let me reach level 10.

The problem was not only how long it would take, but how many monsters I would have to kill. If slaying all the monsters in the forest only got me to level 10, I doubted that there were enough monsters in the entire world to allow me to reach level 100, even if I vanquished every last one of them myself.

"That's the last of them!"

"We killed ours, too!"

"Let's gather the spellstones."

“Okay!”

Clearing the deepest parts of the Ultimate Dungeon and conquering dungeons nonstop ever since was still not enough to reach level 20. There was simply no way enough experience points existed to reach level 100. If that many monsters were around in the first place, then this world would have been overrun long ago.

“If it’s a beast-type, we can handle it.”

“Dog beasts with Pack Tactics, huh?”

“That’s better than birds, I’ll tell you that.”

“Flying is just so unfair!”

Wiggle wiggle.

Miss Armor Rep and Slimey would probably reach level 100 one day. Miss Armor Rep was immortal, and who could even guess how long Slimey would live. But that possibility was closed off to me. I was only human, after all. *I swear I am! Look at my stats, it says so right there!*

“Why are you talking to yourself and checking your own stats over and over?”

“Um, I get bored when the secret rooms suck so much, so I tend to monologue more. Does that make sense?”

Boing!

I had no idea why we were brought to this world, but maybe there was a reason. Back in that white room, the decrepit old man had said something about compatible wavelengths and the aggregate of our souls. I didn’t know what he meant by wavelength, but if that meant that he needed to summon forty-three people, we were in trouble. There were only thirty of us left, and one was useless. Nearly a third of us had died, leaving only 69.76744186% of us to carry on.

I thought it essential that my twenty-nine remaining classmates reach level 100. I had no way of knowing if that would be enough to save humanity, but to make up for the loss of so many lives, we needed to become as capable as possible.

“Watch out! A bear!” the Class Rep called.

“The bears are already trying to eat me,” Vice Rep C shouted, her voice panicky. “The warning’s a little late!”

I couldn’t say for certain, but I felt like there was a reason we were brought to this world. If that was the case, I could not assume that any of us were optional. I could never reach a high enough level to really help, so that was why I had to face the final boss alone. I was a glass-cannon side character, only relevant in the beginning of a story.

Shield Girl smashed into a bear with her shield. “Don’t just mumble to yourself, Haruka-kun. Help us!”

The bear reared back and roared, and for the life of me, it sounded like it was asking a question.

If we were summoned with a purpose, then it likely had something to do with dungeons. Only one kind of monster could be found on any given floor of a dungeon—with so few distractions, figuring out how to defeat them was effortless.

“He’s ignoring us!”

“He’s ignoring the bears, too!”

If we did nothing, if we let a level 100 monster lord rise up from the dungeons and lead an army of fiends, it would be too late—the world would be doomed. We were lucky that we could fight monsters one floor at a time, one dungeon at a time. We couldn’t let them get out.

“He keeps mumbling to himself while beating up any thorn bears that happens to get too close!”

“He looks serious, but I can’t shake the feeling that he’s daydreaming.”

To keep as many people safe as possible, I had to deal with the dungeon king myself. The risk of losing any of my classmates was too high, and their chances of victory were remote. They needed to retreat.

“He’s still talking to himself while evading attacks?!”

“I’m almost starting to root for the bears!”

“They’re the underdogs! No matter how hard they try, he’s defeating them without even paying attention!”

The girls chanted, “Let’s go, bears, let’s go!” as if they were at a sporting event. Slimey bounced along with their chant.

Though I was weak, my epic Luck made me much harder to kill, and my collection of rare skills increased my chances of success. *High risk, high reward.*

We were likely brought to the frontier because it was the most dangerous region of this world, what with the monster-riddled forest, the Ultimate Dungeon, and the potential for all-out war. Two villages had already been destroyed by a horde of rampaging monsters from that forest. Right now, those threats weren’t a problem. We needed to clean up the remaining dungeons to make the frontier safe. Unchecked, the flood of monsters from these remaining dungeons could devastate the duchy and weaken the frontier’s military enough that the kingdom would see an opportunity to invade. Then we’d have a war on top of a deluge of monsters.

No matter how many times I explained it, no one seemed to understand: this was the brutal logic of the world. It just was.

“Even the very last bear was ignored and then squashed.”

“I can’t even make out what he’s saying!”

No matter how I thought about it, the whole “summoned to an alternate world” premise just truly, truly sucked. This wasn’t some story where heroes got summoned to another world to fight and struggle, but ultimately got to live in peace. Such a thing might be fun to read about, but this world wasn’t so easy.

“Why is he crying? What’s wrong with him?” Vice Rep A pondered. “He’s clearly not in any danger.”

“Maybe he’s feeling remorse for what he did to those poor bears,” Vice Rep B said.

“I want to be worried for him, but he’s making me worry instead!”

“What’s wrong, Haruka-kun? You’re not going to die!”

Why are they yelling? I’m not dead. I think?

This wouldn't last forever—once the girls were over level 100, I'd be taking the easy road. I promise you that.

"Huh? I was just thinking that these old bones just want to retire," I said. "Don't worry, I'll keep us safe till you're all over level 100. Then it's some well-earned rest, y'know what I mean?"

"Why are you planning to retire in the middle of a dungeon?!"

Hey, at least I had plans!

"We're worried about you fighting the dungeon king alone, and all you can think about is early retirement?" the Class Rep asked.

"Er, well, the most dangerous boss I've faced was definitely Miss Armor Rep, followed by Slimey. I survived, didn't I?" I said. "Anything stronger than those two and I would have noped out. Anyway, I think all the dungeon kings are starting to stay home and shirk their responsibilities."

Sure, there was some risk, but not compared to what I had to go through so far. The fact that I had survived this long was solid proof that there was nothing left that could kill me.

"Compared to what I've faced before, a level 100 Dungeon King isn't a threat," I said. "The two most dangerous entities in this world are standing right beside me, y'know? The third most powerful monster isn't even a concern. It should just take a consolation prize and call it a day."

"What are you even talking about?!"

"A consolation prize? Is that what you call massacring the bears?"

"Well, it's worth consideration, y'know?"

It probably would not be that easy. The two most powerful beings in this world were considerably weakened after resetting to level 1. Though I had become more powerful since then, even if only a little.

"Forget it," the Class Rep said, sighing. "Let's focus on the 49th floor!"

"Right!"

The girls wiped out the level 49 Armor Chameleons. The monsters tried to camouflage themselves, but the girls used their incredible Presence Sensing to hunt down every last one of them. *So they can definitely sense me, too.*

“Remember your promise,” the Class Rep said.

“We’ll retreat if you say so. Just make sure you don’t do anything too reckless.”

“If you do, we’ll take your allowance away and give it all to Slimey and Angelica.”

“C-come on, are you saying that of the three of us, I’m the one who can’t be trusted with money? How can you even compare me to those two Avatars of Greed and Gluttony?!”

Wiggle wiggle?

Sure, I was an avatar of Lust and Sloth, but I wasn’t spendthrift! *Furthermore, I’m the hardest-working slacker in the world!* To add insult to injury, the girls confiscated any money I made off of them when they bought my goods! *I’m not even a paid freelancer at this point.*

We descended to the 50th floor. I had a bad feeling about this.

What awaited us was a level 100 boss, Cerberus, the hellhound that guarded the gates of Hades. This monster from the deepest depths of hell...was just a cute pupper with one more head than its little brother Orthrus.

I remembered lil’ Orthrus had tried to cover its two snouts with its paws. It died, though.

Its big brother Cerberus also tried to cover its snouts with its forepaws, but could only cover two out of three, so the middle head—and then the rest—soon died in agony, too. Well, so much for the bad feeling...it was already dead.

“Uh...retreat?” I said.

“Why would we need to retreat now?” the Class Rep said. “You already killed the beast! That was so tragic! The poor doggy trying to cover its poor middle nose!”

“How strong is that vinegar?! Is that safe for cooking?!”

“My sinuses are on fire!”

Jiggle jiggle?!

The whole floor reeked of vinegar. My eyes watered and my nose burned. Mucus ran from my nose to no avail. *Time to go!* Even Slimey, who didn’t have a nose or eyes, seemed miserable.

“I was so worried that we would have to fight something on Slimey’s level, but the poor dog died with a whimper...”

“It was in so much pain!”

“I’m going to hear that agonized whine in my sleep tonight.”

Cerberus was a level 100 Dungeon King, but it was just a dog, so dealing with it was easy enough. It was ridiculously, terrifyingly powerful, but I didn’t even break a sweat. Slimey was thus far the only exceptional dungeon king. He was cute and wiggly, after all, like jelly.

“What the hell was that? You were screaming ‘*retreat!*’ while spraying vinegar everywhere!”

“I never expected to see the guard dog of Hades yowl in anguish like that!”

My jiggly friend had no weaknesses. On top of his incredible stats, he was immune to all types of damage. I couldn’t find any way of defeating him. This overgrown puppy was all bark and no bite in comparison. All you needed was a little vinegar.

“After all that spooky atmosphere and the big dramatic entrance, Cerberus only got a chance to yelp.”

“Is it just me or did the guardian of the underworld not seem like an embodiment of infernal wrath at all?”

The dungeon king was an enormous all-rounder with Perfect Resistance, Herculean Strength, God Speed, Leap, and Evasion, and Infernal magic. Not that we got to see any of that in action.

“We would’ve gotten wiped out if we tried to fight,” said Class Rep.

“I only saw the stats for a moment, but they were insane!”

“There’s no way that we could’ve won, so telling us to retreat was the right call at the time.”

“Yeah, the idea was fine, but the person suggesting it is always wrong!”

“Huh? I couldn’t win that kind of fight either,” I said. “What did you expect me to do?”

Additionally, the three-headed dog had Slash Resistance, Magic Evasion, Physical Evasion, Inferno Flame, Arctic Frost, Hyper Revival, Vorpal Fangs, and many more. I barely had time to read the full skill list!

“Yeah, but all that yelping...how could we retreat while that was happening? It was so pitiful,” the Class Rep said.

“All I can remember is how pathetic it looked trying to cover its snouts!”

It died before it got a chance to act, but the girls wouldn’t have had a chance against something so powerful. Telling them to retreat was the right call, so I didn’t do anything wrong.

“The level wall before level 100 is probably way bigger than any of the others, y’know?” I said. “Just to get through its damage resistance, you would need to have the stats of a level 100 adventurer, right? I don’t think people below that level can do anything to a level 100 dungeon boss.”

“Didn’t *you* just kill it?”

“That poor doggy died crying its little heart out.”

“Three heads yelping, I can still hear it!”

I was pretty good at dealing with dogs and bugs. Vinegar and insecticide solved most problems. It always worked in my world, after all.

Still, this vinegar was something else. It was as harsh as tear-gas! We all still had runny noses.

Wiggle...wiggle...

Slimey jiggled in disappointment as he sampled the meal I’d left for him—he was clearly not a fan of pickled Cerberus. Was it too sour? Slimey puddled

pitifully, somehow becoming even more oozy than usual.

“Well, good work, I guess? Not that much work was done or anything.”

Miss Armor Rep nodded. Slimey jiggled.

Because of Hyper Revival, we had to kill it as quickly as possible. I had lobbed a vinegar bomb, then Miss Armor Rep, Slimey, and I leapt up and simultaneously cut off the beast’s heads. The vinegar was already hard to stomach from a distance; it became a suffocating miasma up close. My eyes burned like hell! Who made this vicious vinegar?!

I decided to make more vinegar bombs. It was too dangerous to sell in the general store, but I could make tons of money at the weapons store!

“Why are you going to sell something so monstrous?!” the Class Rep said.

“W-what? But Cerberus was the monster!” I protested.

“Yet again, you show no remorse for your crimes!”

The level 99 Minotaurs from the Ultimate Dungeon had higher stats, but Cerberus had a far better skill set. It was overwhelmingly more powerful in comparison.

I had kinda wanted the Class Rep to Hijack some of those skills, but it was still too dangerous. She would’ve died instantly if she’d been so much as grazed by one of the nails on the beast’s paws as it flung them out to protect its nose. It would have shredded the Class Rep to bits, and I don’t think people grow back.

For that very reason, I knew I made the right call. I couldn’t let the girls fight on their own. It was too dangerous. The Class Rep didn’t even have the forethought to keep vinegar on hand! *So unprepared.*

“I don’t want to admit it, but you were right, Haruka-kun,” the Class Rep said.

“I know that I couldn’t have beaten that monster.”

“Even if I was level 100, I doubt that I could’ve won!”

“Next time, we’ll listen and retreat—so long as you keep your side of the promise, Haruka-kun!”

“Yeah! You can’t do anything reckless!”

From now on, the 50th floor was off-limits to any of my classmates. Though the meatheads would probably forget what floor they were on and end up there...could they even count to fifty? *That might be a problem—their idiocy, that is.*

Taking a peek from a safe vantage point on the stairs up, I saw that the Cerberus had become a spellstone.

No one volunteered to grab it. The girls kept insisting that it was the responsibility of the person who sprayed vinegar everywhere. I went back out to retrieve the spellstone.

“Agh! It reeks! I can’t breathe! My eyes are burning!”

“And whose fault is that?!” came a chorus of voices.

The spellstone was enormous and crystal clear, obviously high grade. The boss dropped some treasure, too: “Legendary Beast Leather Armor: Speed +50%, Vitality +30%, Slash Immunity, Magic Evasion, Physical Evasion, Incarnate.” *Jackpot!* I didn’t know what Incarnate did, but it sounded awesome! It sounded so cool that I was pretty sure I would never get a chance to use it. That happened with any other cool skills or items I found so far. Alas, this one wasn’t going to be any different.

The air was doing a number on my sinuses again, so I wanted to retreat back to the stairs immediately...but naturally there was a secret room on this floor. *Lucky me.* Even the secret room was tainted with the stench of vinegar.

With bleary eyes and a runny nose, I entered and opened the treasure chest. It contained a “Commander Ring: Command, Leadership, Total Effect Sharing.” The Class Rep definitely needed this. Command and Leadership were good skills, but Total Effect Sharing had to be incredibly rare. I suspected that it shared all of the buffs of the leader to all the members of her group. In other words, all my classmates would have the Class Rep’s cheat skills, strengthening the entire party. Did it mean that all my classmates would suddenly gain the effects of Alpha Male and Super Horny? Would my classmates turn into a bunch of mega-perverts?

“Hee hee hee hee...” I chuckled.

“Class Rep, calm down!”

“She’s sprouting horns!”

Wiggle wiggle?

What was that chill just now?

Unfortunately, it probably didn’t share the effects of special skills like Hijack. What a pity. That probably excluded monster skills like Alpha Male and Super Horny, too.

I brought the items back before they started to stink too much of vinegar. My eyes stung.

Why was everyone mad at me? Whatever, after some negotiations, we agreed that I could keep the Legendary Beast Leather Armor. In return, I forgave them three rings worth of debt each—we had agreed to a payment plan where I could forgive debts in exchange for dungeon loot. *Forgiving thirty rings worth of debt sounds extreme, but it’s worth it for such an amazing item—two rare types of evasion!*

I was also curious about Incarnate. *Inhabiting another body didn’t sound especially great or anything...but it’s worth a try, right?*

Of course, everyone unanimously voted that the Class Rep should have the Commander Ring. I couldn’t command anyone, and I definitely didn’t want to inflict my unfortunate skills on the rest of the class. *Body Manipulation meant that your body moved as soon as you thought about it, and if you weren’t careful using Walking Mastery, you would trip on your own feet! Suddenly gaining those skills mid-battle would be a disaster. Seriously!*

DAY 52

LUNCH

Make friends with the goddesses of greed; don't underestimate their negotiating power.

A DUNGEON

ESCAPING FROM THE offensive odors of the dungeon, we enjoyed a picnic outside. As expected, the dungeon had little to offer a discerning real estate investor, but the loot was incredible, and the final boss's spellstone was of quite a high grade.

Unfortunately, high quality spellstones were typically too valuable to sell; I'd have to exchange them at the guild. Using it as a spellstone battery would be good, too, but I needed money.

"Lunch is ready! It's still in development, but you're all fortunate enough to be the guinea pigs for my latest experiment! Fresh pasta, y'know? Napolitan-style—err, not like from Naples but it's sort of like handmade pasta napolitan. Sort of, uh, I didn't have regular wheat flour, and the noodles turned out more like udon noodles, so some might claim that this is udon napolitan? Well, it's definitely noodles."

"Oh, I'm in! Whether it's pasta napolitan or udon napolitan, I'm starved!"

"Looks great!"

"It reminds me of home!"

Jiggle jiggle?!

I had managed to rustle up some kind of coarse-ground flour—maybe durum flour, maybe not. Either way, it was no good for bread, so I decided to make some noodles with it, and they turned out okay. They were more like udon than spaghetti, but the result still seemed pretty appetizing.

"It's great! I want seconds!"

“Me too!”

“I’ve been strangely hungry ever since getting here!”

“The food has been weirdly delicious, too!”

They ordered seconds, so I sautéed some more freshly boiled pasta in a mixture of tomatoes, mushrooms, bird meat, ketchup, and pepper.

“It’s just an experiment I made with some flour I got from the general store,” I said. “I heard that durum wheat doesn’t make good bread, so I tried making pasta with it. Since it’s more like udon, maybe I’ll make yaki udon next time.”

“Ooh, he made cream sauce, too!”

“I can’t believe we’re eating pasta napolitan!”

“Seconds! Yay!” Vice Rep C squeaked.

The noodles were a bit dry and crunchy, but I was pretty sure that was a problem with the quality of the flour, not my kneading. Next time, I would add eggs.

“It’s so good!”

“This is real pasta!”

“Napolitan and I, reunited at last...will I ever see the shores of Naples?”

“Can you make carbonara next time?”

“Yes please!”

“I love pasta peperoncino too, but carbonara definitely comes first!”

Jiggle jiggle!

The cream sauce was actually a basic bechamel sauce made with flour and milk. I could never have recreated the nostalgic dishes these girls craved if I cared about authenticity, after all.

“Unfortunately, carbonara is probably impossible right now,” I said. “Eggs are so precious, and I have yet to track down any cheese or cream.”

“Oh, well,” the Class Rep said. “The napolitan is amazing.”

Boing boing!

Country Living contained a description of the various production methods for dairy products. We just needed more livestock to set up a dairy farm. But that was still a way off.

“There is such a harmony of flavors between the mushrooms and pasta!”

“You can’t go wrong with the mushrooms in this world, right?”

“I never cared for mushrooms back in Japan, but the ones here are delicious!”

Why did the girls like mushrooms so much? They asked me to include them in every meal I cooked. Were they becoming addicts? *To be fair, they’re pretty delicious.*

“Thanks for the food!”

“That was so good!”

“Now it’s clean-up time!”

“Let’s do it!”

Jiggle!

I was glad that everyone was safe, but now I knew for sure that it was too risky for them to fight dungeon kings until they were at least level 100. Anything from the 50th floor onward was too dangerous.

A mid-boss on the 50th floor was something that three parties working together could probably take on. All twenty-nine of my classmates would need to work together to defeat a level 50 Dungeon King. But a level 100 Dungeon King? That was way beyond their limits. Even if they somehow won such a battle, there was no way they would get out unscathed. If they could learn to work as a perfect team, they might have a higher chance, but they would still risk someone dying.

“Next up, yesterday’s jellyfish dungeon. We’ll take care of it,” I said. “Go help the other groups reach the 49th floor, okay? But promise you won’t try the 50th floor. I’m serious. Don’t push yourselves too hard.”

“Okay, I get it! You shouldn’t push yourself either!”

“Stay safe!”

“You promised!”

“Yeah! You promised that we’d have Hamburg steak tonight!”

Jiggle? Jiggle?!

When did I promise that?! The power of women terrified me at times. As *expected of friends of the Goddess of Greed*, I thought. *One must never underestimate their negotiating acumen.* They even handed me more clothing orders.

“See you later!” they called.

Wiggle wiggle.

They were insatiable. Now they were requesting that I make them M-65 military jackets. Why were they trying to go modern military in a fantasy world?

When we first reached town, my classmates were all ecstatic about wearing loose, rope-belted tunics. They actually looked setting-appropriate. Lately, however, they wore outfits that would’ve looked more at home on the streets of modern Japan. *I draw the line at copying the Louis Vuitton monogram! LV is only short for “level” in this world!*

“What else did they ask for? Nylon? I can’t do that! I’d need to dig an oil well and build an oil refinery! What’s next? An internal-combustion engine? This is the awe-inspiring power of these girls—these goddesses of greed!”

Well, I remembered seeing how to make a similar material using alchemy before, something like a resin coating.

“All right, shall we get down to business? You too, Slimey. Don’t wander off on your own, okay? Let’s go.”

Jiggle jiggle.

Nod nod.

C’mon, Miss Armor Rep, you can use people words! Lately, she had become too lazy to bother vocalizing, instead relying on gestures alone. The only time she exercised her vocabulary anymore was to scold me in the morning!

As usual, I didn't get a chance to fight, but we made our way down to the 50th floor. *I have absolutely nothing to do when we go to dungeons!* This level-reset slime was freaking unstoppable!

Slimey must have taken an interest in how I used Magic Hands. He shot tentacles out from his round, blobby body and duplicated my Wire Cutter attack. *So cute, yet so strong!*

"I just came up with that technique and you ripped it off already! No, you didn't just copy me, you're doing it better! Why am I even here?"

Even though Slimey had a great aptitude for magic and incredible defenses, he preferred melee. He had a particularly large appetite for devouring monsters.

It barely deserved mention, as commonplace as it was, but Miss Armor Rep, clad in her shining, silver-white armor, waltzed a deadly dance through her foes. She had such an aggressive fighting style, yet she was untouchable. Rather, her aggressive fighting style was so overpowering that she literally sliced *through* enemy attacks.

"Will no one show me the least bit of compassion and leave some monsters for me to fight? No?"

Wiggle wiggle.

Servitude was probably normally something monster tamers used to send their thralls to fight on the front lines while they hung back and used spells and support magic from the rear. Was I supposed to fight like a monster tamer?

"Ugh, it's so boring to just sit here and do nothing—my front-line monsters exterminate everything before I get a chance! I'm just grumbling alone in the back! I have no friends and no foes!"

Yeah, I wasn't a monster tamer; no one listened to me.

Honestly, I was in no position to criticize how the girls fought, because I didn't have any strategy at all. How could I when my skills made no sense?

"I have weapons suited for the front lines, but my magic is better suited for long-range combat. I end up using my magic to Teleport and entangle my

attacks. Then, my skills are only suited for some sort of super-fast stealth character. What am I supposed to do with those skills?”

I was some sort of sneaky, guerrilla-tactics, front-line wizard. That was *technically* a fighting style.

“A magic-imbued, blitz-tactic, stealthy, melee sorcerer doesn’t make any sense! It makes as much sense as an intimidating, hammer-wielding Archsage!”

Jiggle jiggle.

All I knew was that I was useless on a team. My fighting style made cooperative strategies impossible. No one could command me, and I couldn’t coordinate with anyone. I could only charge in all by myself... It earned me the Sword Master title, after all.

We were three...creatures—no, wait, I was a human! So, we were a trio, but we weren’t remotely coordinated. I certainly couldn’t function in a team.

After all, only one of us was a tank: Slimey. Miss Armor Rep and I relied purely on evasion! Miss Armor Rep killed enemies too fast to even try defense. Meanwhile, the so-called tank frolicked and bounced all over the place.

“You were supposed to be our new tank!” I moaned. “Tanks aren’t supposed to be that fast! I can’t keep up!”

The slime wiggled from side to side.

Since we all relied on speed, there was no point to us trying defensive formations. Our only strategy was “charge,” our only style was “fast.”

I had been up on my high horse criticizing the girls for not mixing offense and defense. All I could do was offense. There wasn’t anything flexible about my tactics, just pure aggression!

“I guess I only think about strategy after killing a monster, huh?”

Miss Armor Rep nodded. Slimey jiggled.

For now, all I could do was throw myself into battle. *Charge!*

More beast-types, Level 51 Metal-Horned Elands. They were basically cows that thought they were antelopes. Antelopes with the eyes and souls of cows.

They seemed rather intent on impaling us with their metal horns. The herd stampeded towards us in a cow-like fashion. With their incredible jumping power, they bounded into the sky, lowered their horns toward us, and came crashing back down. The sharp points of their horns rained down like spears. While they were still airborne, I leapt up and whacked them right on their vulnerable backsides. They plummeted right down into Slimey's ravening maw, a full course of falling meatballs for the hungry slime below.

Miss Armor Rep sliced up any remaining metal-horned elands that landed, though she made sure to launch them towards Slimey.

Munch, crunch, munch!

The elands seemed to satisfy Slimey. They were basically beef, after all.

Slimey jumped with joy...perhaps he absorbed Leap from the metal-horned elands when he ate them. The more Slimey ate, the stronger he became. At this point, he was bursting with power.

We continued to the 52nd floor, where a coordinated strike awaited us. A storm of fire bullets rained down on us—a nice little snack for Slimey, who gobbled them down.

Wiggle, gobble!

"Huh? That wasn't enough? Give the slime another round! You're doing me a huge favor, covering food expenses like this!"

Miss Armor Rep skillfully deflected stray fire bullets back towards Slimey. *She's so considerate.*

The level 52 Magic Mandrills responsible for the fire storm were next on the menu. They were swallowed whole by my gigantic jelly-like friend.

"I never thought about it before, but mandrills do kind of look like mages, right? Like wild hedge wizards, y'know? Even though they're just monkeys."

With their magic gobbled up, they had no chance, no matter how numerous they were. Slimey had just reached level 10, so Inferno magic could've been a problem, but basic Fire magic was a joke. In the future, I would have to be careful about Slimey's diet. Slimey could end up eating something dangerous if I

didn't pay attention.

Wiggle wiggle?

If it looked tasty, Slimey ate it. If it didn't, Miss Armor Rep killed it. No matter what, I did nothing.

I found a pair of gauntlets on the 53rd floor and checked their status: "Sturdy Gauntlets: Power +30%, Defense +30%, Attack bonus."

On the 57th floor, we encountered level 57 Phantom Lords. Slimey didn't seem to like their flavor, so we chopped them up. Turned out that slimes could cut ghosts.

Slimey probably preferred to eat beasts. Though I did recall him devouring those creepy puppets.

"Put me in, coach!" I shouted. "Not that you're not doing great, but I'm right here!"

Regardless, I next found the following: "Arcane Chainmail: Magic Resistance (large), Physical Resistance (medium), Defense bonus."

I could use these myself, but putting them up for auction would be better. Sure, I kind of wanted them, but there was no point to improving my defense. The attack bonus was nice, but Dimension Blade made it a bit redundant. *Better that I auction it to buff my classmates instead.* On the other hand, all of the girls were flat broke. They kept spending all their money on clothes! The more I overcharged them, the more they ordered.

DAY 52

AFTERNOON

Running around screaming, “This is the power of Hamon!” isn’t going to make Vibration any more effective, you know?

A DUNGEON

THE 60TH FLOOR seemed to be the last. It wasn’t as deep as the Ultimate Dungeon, but the dungeon king was certain to be at least level 60.

Smaller dungeons weren’t a high priority because they weren’t likely to overflow with monsters. It made sense that there were plenty of deeper dungeons around, but the number that had more than fifty floors still surprised me. Were they still growing?

“I’m getting a pretty bad feeling about the lower floors. Let’s be careful, okay?”

Nod nod. Jiggle jiggle.

One of the small dungeons was mainly dangerous because it appeared so close to a village, but I solved that problem with a little flooding. The rest were all medium-depth, and we were getting through them slowly but surely.

From the 50th floor onward, direct combat was out of the question, so these floors were too dangerous for the girls. The nerds and the meatheads should avoid them too, but I wasn’t worried. They would run for the hills at the first sign of trouble.

That’s the right move, of course, I thought. The girls could surely benefit from better instincts. Cowardice was the better part of valor, after all. They should learn that from the guys, so long as they didn’t turn into nerds or meatheads themselves. *Anything but that!*

We climbed down to the 60th floor and faced a level 60 Sand Giant. It was a giant made of sand, obviously.

It didn't know how to do anything but throw a tantrum with its giant body. Against an enemy like this, I probably could've brought the girls along. No, there definitely would have been casualties. Seriously.

I slashed the bumbling Sand Giant with Dimension Blade and used spells to burn it, douse it in water, freeze it, electrocute it, and so on. I even tried to crush it with Holding and Weight. Finally, I concluded my flurry of attacks with a furious Life or Death.

This is taking a while, isn't it? Miss Armor Rep's storm of slashes and Slimey's flurry of blows only dispersed it into a cloud of sand that quickly reformed. Even Slimey couldn't eat that much sand...plus it wouldn't taste very good.

The monster didn't have Immortality; we just hadn't delivered a killing blow.

Boing boing?!

Using Jupiter Eye, I tried to find the giant's core with no luck. There weren't any secret rooms or unusual features on this floor, either. It was just a sand monster. I couldn't even sense the flow of magic. I could find no way to kill it.

"Hm, what's going on? We need to stop charging in and think of a plan," I said.

If we only faced the giant, we could've retreated, trapping the monster inside by collapsing the stairs. Unfortunately, sand soldiers kept endlessly spawning and attacking us. No matter how many we stabbed, crushed, or burned, more took their place. They were mindless and weak, little more than puppets, but they couldn't be killed. But that was exactly the problem.

With no idea how to kill it, we faced an ever-growing army of sand puppets led by a sand giant commander. Even if we tried to flee, the soldiers would pursue us. If they made it to the surface, that would spell doom for the frontier. Nothing sounded quite as apocalyptic as a frontier overwhelmed by unkillable sand monsters.

We couldn't afford to let an infinitely spawning army leave the dungeon. Retreat was no longer an option, as we were surrounded by a wall of sand.

“You didn’t see any rooms related to this puzzle, right? This *is* a puzzle, yeah?”

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle.

This was a worst-case scenario—even if I led a suicidal charge to break through the sand wall and we escaped, the monsters would be able to follow us. Slimey and Miss Armor Rep unleashed an onslaught of attacks on their foes, scattering sand...only for the sand to then reconstitute into new monsters. They had no cores—they were nothing but animate sand. I couldn’t sense any source of magic that controlled them, either. I didn’t understand how they worked, so I couldn’t discern any weakness. We could only continue to kill the sand warriors as they spawned.

“There has to be something else. Trying to flush the sand away with Water magic doesn’t work, and I can’t burn the sand either. Slicing through them with Dimensional Slash doesn’t work either, they just reform. Vibration only causes them to lose their form for a moment, y’know?”

Looking at the exhausting list of skills in my status screen, I found nothing useful. I had to figure something out. The situation was getting worse and there was nothing I could do. We were totally screwed...and the only thing left to do was a desperate gamble.

“I’m going to try something out, okay? But I probably won’t be able to move at all while I do it. Can you take care of things until then, maybe?”

I had no idea if my plan would work, but this dungeon could overflow sooner than expected, and I couldn’t let that happen. If the Sand Giant escaped, there would be no stopping it.

Jiggle!

Nod!

“Miss Armor Rep, I *know* you can talk! I get that it’s hard to talk while wearing a helmet, but still.”

Both the former dungeon emperor and a former dungeon king approved of

my plan. That had to count for something. The sand monsters could respawn as much as they wanted, it didn't matter. Nothing that these immortal foes did could change the fact that two of the most ludicrously powerful creatures agreed with me. I only wished that they would actually speak.

Sitting down in the middle of the sandstorm of endless soldiers, I focused, I concentrated. I used Insentience and Supreme Thinking—nothing more.

Only two possibilities came to mind. First, if the monster wasn't animated by magic, then it was some sort of magnetism. However, using Lightning magic didn't cause any sort of reaction, and I couldn't feel any electromagnetic force releasing the tension in my shoulders or improving my blood flow.

That left only one possibility—by far the worst one.

Every single grain of sand contained a tiny fragment of a core inside. Nigh-infinite shards of one core. If I didn't destroy every single grain simultaneously, the monster wouldn't die. It couldn't be killed. This was all I could come up with.

In that case, my efforts were wasted. We could cut sand all we wanted, and it could easily reform into a new core. There was simply no way to destroy every single grain of sand. They didn't melt when I used Fire magic, after all. *Is there any other way?* There was nothing I could do. There were no options left. I had to kick reason to the curb and make them myself.

Despite my misgivings, I had an inkling of an idea, a faint glimmer of hope. It seemed ridiculous. Reading through the *Grimoire of Magick* confirmed my suspicions: Vibration magic did not exist in this world.

Yet my classmates were able to learn Vibration magic. Even the meatheads managed to learn it, despite their idiocy! If they could learn it, then villagers, goblins, and even fish could learn Vibration magic...a type of magic that wasn't supposed to exist! Much to my horror, they somehow managed!

It was something that didn't exist, but even the meatheads figured it out. As shocking as it was, even the meatheads had a little bit of modern knowledge bouncing around the emptiness in their heads! *This is honestly the most unbelievable part of all of this.*

They could learn Vibration magic because on some level, they knew that vibrations were a physical phenomenon. They could recreate it—physical vibrations, ripples—because they understood it.

After learning the basics, both the meatheads and the nerds ran around shouting, *“This is the power of Hamon!”* as they practiced Vibration magic. In the meantime, I was getting scolded. I had wanted to join in. They looked like they were having so much fun.

Vibration didn’t work anything like Hamon, but it gave me an idea. Fire magic existed in this world, as did Ice, Inferno, and Freezing magic—but Heat magic didn’t.

I could use that skill because I understood how heat worked, just like I could use Vibration magic because I understood the concept of vibrations. Following from that, Heat magic was actually a variant of Vibration magic. Even if I could produce heat through the electromagnetic interactions of Lightning magic, I wouldn’t gain the Heat magic skill.

Thinking back, I realized that Packing became Holding, and from them I had learned Magic Manipulation and Magic Entanglement. Similarly, Weight became Gravity, a type of gravity manipulation. In turn, I developed Airwalk and Dash based on those forms of magic.

The same thing happened with Movement. It became Teleport—in principle, both were a form of spatial manipulation. Understanding that enabled me to learn Rapid Movement and Overclock.

The endless flashing silver gleam, the endless rampage of the Sand Giant’s attacks battering against us—it all stopped.

“Oh man, this is really going to work. There’s no way it can’t, y’know? Maybe?”

So, what could I do with Heat magic then? What kind of new manipulation could I achieve?

“Since it’s related to Vibration, then what am I really doing when I use Heat? I’m vibrating the molecules themselves,” I said.

Because I understood the principles of gravity and space, I was able to learn

Gravity and Teleport magic, magic that was unknown in this world. I could use Heat magic because I knew that heat was a byproduct of particles vibrating.

That could only mean that Heat allowed me to manipulate particles directly. *If so, I should be able to raise or lower the frequency of a particle's vibration, which in turn means that I can freely control the movement of atoms. Ultimately, I should be able to trigger nuclear decay!*

Focus. I had to ignore the storm of sand soldiers completely. *Focus.* Endlessly shifting grains of sand whipped at us, congealing and reforming into fresh soldiers. Slimey and Miss Armor Rep were protecting me the entire time. I simply needed to focus. Atoms would emit radiation when they collapsed—radioactive decay, atomic fission—whatever you called it, it was a potential nuke. *That's too terrifying to use!*

Choosing not to use that power was fine, but being unable to use it? That was a mistake. Refusing to learn how to use a weapon that an enemy might use against us was the height of madness. To deter others, I had to use this power myself. Besides, if the Sand Giant got out of here, the frontier would be done for.

At that point, we would need to seal off the entire border. By comparison, a nuclear detonation deep underground was a much better option. A lot of people could die, but the realm would survive, and the survivors could escape.

That was the worst-case scenario, but it made this strategy a last resort. *Surely, we aren't that desperate, I thought, I should keep calm.*

Boing, jiggle, boing!

My two companions had things under control for now. They wouldn't let anything happen, any *happening* had no chance of happening. I didn't need to rush too much, but I couldn't slack either.

Those two would keep fighting with everything they had until the final whistle blew. They would give me as much time as I needed to figure out how to end this.



Though the fragments of the core were only fragments, I was sure that I could disintegrate them.

I used Holding magic to hold the sand composing the Sand Giant, and with Heat and Vibration, I raised temperatures and made the atoms vibrate. Thermolysis would've been great, but the worst could still happen, decay leading to nuclear fission.

I emptied my mind with Insentience and focused with Supreme Thinking. I began to use Magic Control and Vibration in a state of pure concentration. Sitting perfectly still without even lifting a finger, I was completely safe. The maelstrom of monstrous sand couldn't reach me, not through the flashes of silver.

No matter where I looked, I saw the afterimages of Miss Armor Rep as her sword flashed relentlessly through the sandstorm. *She really has no equal, huh?* She couldn't die—you couldn't kill her, and that was that. She did what she could to repel the onslaught of sand. She created an eye in the storm, a place of calm for me.

With slow, painstaking precision, I made the atoms of the Sand Giant vibrate. I didn't rush; I patiently awaited the results of my labors. Here in my safe zone, I certainly wasn't going to die...not until the nuclear meltdown, at least.

In my focused state, I lost track of time. *Is this a side effect of Insentience?* There was no correlation between the speed of my thoughts and the passage of time.

The raging sandstorm continued. Miss Armor Rep blasted the sand apart as soon as it coalesced with her own storm of silvery slashes, scattering her foes into swirls of sand. An immortal, eternal enemy meant nothing to her. She would have been content to continue this duel for eternity.

The Sand Giant picked a fight with the wrong folks. Those two would never stop fighting. They formed a perfect team of unstoppable offense and impenetrable defense. They drew a proverbial line in the sand and created an absolute territory. *Oh, that reminds me—I have to make some knee-high socks*

for her, let her try 'em on, and do my best!

This battle was almost over.

The particles were beginning to collapse as I worked to maintain control. The storm began to weaken and slow...I maintained an extremely minute stability, preventing any critical reactions.

Soon, we were surrounded by a perfectly ordinary desert.

“Okay, looks like the dungeon’s dead, so we’re good here, right? I’m pretty sure I disintegrated it all, and nothing seems to be moving, so...I’m starving, let’s get out of here. What time is it, anyway?”

Good golly, I was ravenous. It felt like way past dinner time. Maybe I used way too much MP. I wanted to eat, but I still had to make Hamburg steak.

I couldn’t believe that all I got for my hard work was more work. I couldn’t even enjoy a well-earned meal without making the Hamburg steak first!

“Isn’t that the strangest thing of all? Back at the inn, everyone is waiting for me to get back so I can make their dinner! I mean, I’ll make it...I need the money, but even so, y’know?”

Wiggle wiggle?

The girls probably cruised through a ton of dungeons today. If I didn’t rip them off good tonight, my wallet was going to be the one disintegrating!

DAY 52

NIGHT

When you get caught in traps it's too late because they're traps.

A DUNGEON

I DEFEATED THE ULTIMATE DUNGEON, the most sinister of dungeons. I exterminated all the terrifying monsters from the evil forest, and I averted a war by sealing off the frontier. Now, as I gallivanted around, dealing with the remaining dungeons, I figured that things were making steady progress. I assumed that the greatest threats facing this world were under control.

What a fool I was! I figured that if I got the frontier under control while I was still weak, everyone else would become strong in the meantime. If I allowed my classmates to join me on the 60th floor of that dungeon, someone would have died—potentially everyone, if I had to worry about protecting them. This fantasy world was the worst, as it always had been.

“I’m tired and my head hurts!”

Jiggle jiggle.

I was able to get out alive because I was protected by a former dungeon emperor and a former dungeon king. They wouldn’t have been able to protect everyone. They were able to protect me because I was only one person.

That was dangerous, I thought. *I couldn’t think of a way to deal with it that was less drastic than a nuclear reaction.* If any other party joined me, every last person would have bit it.

“That monster...” started Miss Armor Rep.

“It has to be rare. If there were a lot of them, the frontier would’ve become a desolate waste a long time ago.”

Wiggle wiggle.

I was convinced that my classmates shouldn't be allowed to explore beyond the 49th floor. They would have to wait until they reached level 100. That should make them exponentially more powerful, but a level 100 Dungeon King would still be dangerous. There could still be more unique bosses like that Sand Giant. *This world is an impossible game!*

I had no way to overcome these problems. I could only come up with boss-fight strategies after having faced them firsthand. *I'm too hungry to think about this!*

"Is hunger a status ailment? I think I got it."

I chewed on a strip of jerky and tossed a couple to Slimey. I'd bought up the general store's entire stock, so I had plenty to share. I was just broke. *If Slimey likes them, I'll keep buying them.*

If I had run out of MP, the atomic vibration would have gone awry. I still had my seemingly infinite supply of MP from the battery in my bag—but if it had run out, we would have been on the verge of complete disaster. I had to use an unbelievable amount of magic to keep the reactions locked down. That meant that if my MP had fully depleted, everything would have spun out of control immediately.

Let's seal this technique away! It's too dangerous!

Turning to Miss Armor Rep, I said, "Thanks, I owe you a big gift. It'll be clothes or food again, okay? Actually, what time is it? Are any stores still open, maybe?"

Jiggle jiggle.

She deserved a real reward. Having someone sit down unmoving in the middle of a floor with an endlessly respawning horde of monsters had to be annoying, but she didn't let a single one get past. If it were me, I would've kicked them. Then I would stomp all over them! So yeah, she deserved a reward.

"Whoa, it even turned into a spellstone! That's great. I was worried that it would turn into a sea of teeny tiny spellstones. I even made a shovel just in case, y'know?"

If a teenage boy was seen playing in the sand with a shovel, he would've

definitely caused a public disturbance. *Hell, I would definitely report him to the cops, y'know?*

The level 60 Dungeon King left behind a massive, crystal-clear spellstone. *Isn't this thing just a giant grain of sand?*

I figured that it was too valuable to sell, but I decided to incorporate it into my MP battery. I could've used the money, especially considering I spent everything I had earlier today, but it wasn't possible.

Besides, I needed to hold on to more spellstones so I could make more magic items. My classmates would've been in serious danger if I didn't keep making them equipment. With their current gear, this floor would've definitely, definitely killed them, without a doubt.

"Ooh, did the boss drop some loot, too?"

The Sand Giant didn't carry any equipment, since it was just a giant pile of sand. Where did the naked giant keep whatever this was? I didn't want to find out.

"Another nudist, huh? Good thing that Nudist Girl wasn't here. It would've turned into a battle of the exhibitionists."

Although I did have the feeling that in an exhibitionist battle, Nudist Girl would've won. Maybe I should've brought her?! Was this the power of nudism?

Huh, the loot was some sort of massive gemstone. I suspected that the Avatar of Avarice standing next to me would want this.

"Let's see, 'Treasure of the Monster Core: Monster core creation and manipulation.' Why would I want to create more monsters? Isn't that counterproductive? We're going all the way to these dungeons to destroy them! Ugh, I'm so hungry, my mind's all a-jumble...jambalaya? I'll make that tomorrow! I put in so much effort making ketchup, it would be a waste not to use it for some jambalaya. I don't have shrimp, but jambalaya it is!"

It was time to go home. I wasn't the only hungry one. All my classmates were probably getting hangry without their Hamburg steak.

“I’m back, let’s eat!” I said. “I’m starved, y’know? I got impatient so I started shaping patties on the way back. I even fried them up as I walked through town!”

“Fresh Hamburg steak! Woohoo!”

“Welcome back, bon appétit!” my classmates shouted.

As expected, they sat in the dining hall, stomachs growling, awaiting my arrival.

“Yay!”

“This was worth waiting for!”

“No kidding!”

They lined up with plates, waiting for me to serve them. Even Poster Girl joined the line, plate in hand. I couldn’t believe an employee of the inn was making one of her guests work! Stalker Girl joined the line too, as if she were my classmate!

“I gotta keep feeding them. That’s the only way to pay off my bills! Keep eating, everybody!”

Jiggle jiggle?!

Everyone ate their Hamburg steak. I was busy frying up more patties, so I decided to make a few regular hamburgers, too. Much to my chagrin, each burger was stolen out from under me.

“Hamburgers!”

“I missed burgers so much!”

“Who says I can’t have hamburgers and Hamburg steak in the same meal?”

Receipts from these big spenders piled up, but my precious hamburgers vanished!

“I want bread and white rice!”

“Haruka-kun, more Hamburg steaks!”

“Hurry up! If you don’t make them fast, we’ll need to eat them with rice or

bread!”

Uh, is that how that works?

“Oh yes!” Vice Rep B said with unexpected intensity. “Mushroom burgers are to die for.”

“If a restaurant sold these, they’d have a line going out the door!”

No more lines, I’m starving! And stop taking my burgers!

“Hey morons, how many times are you going to get back in line?” I shouted. “You’re asking for seconds once a minute! With five of you meatheads, that’s a burger every twelve seconds!”

“These burgers own, dude. Give me another!” the main meathead said, grinning like an idiot.

I started charging them extra after their third burger, but they literally wouldn’t stop coming. The line never shortened and the receipts kept stacking up. *Shit, did I just sell the last burger?!*

“I made over three hundred burgers and didn’t get to eat a single one! I worked so hard, mincing meat and onions as I climbed out of the dungeon, shaping patties as I walked back to town, frying them as I approached the inn, and I get *nothing!* Are you serious?!”

“Whoops! My bad, bro. Thanks for the grub!”

“They were too good, not my fault!”

I was fresh out of meat, so I fried some fish for myself. It was delicious, but it wasn’t the same.

Slimey liked the burgers so much that he wolfed down thirty by himself. He earned them, to be fair, but I couldn’t believe that three hundred Hamburg steaks was too few!

My classmates sunk into their burger-induced food comas. I had plenty of money again, but my feelings about it were very mixed feelings.

I wanted to go bathe with Slimey, but Poster Girl and Stalker Girl went first, and they took Slimey with them. I was literally a loner.

I took a hot loner bath in my loner room, then returned to the loner purgatory of my side gigs. Purgatory was supposed to be a place where sinners atoned for their deeds before they could enter heaven, so why was I in this hell even though I was completely innocent? Why did I have even more orders?!

“If I’m barred from heaven, I’ll have to make my own paradise!” I declared. “Knee socks it is!”

Knit fabrics, that’s what we needed! Knit fabrics had wonderful elasticity, but manufacturing them took forever. Good thing I could summon Magic Hands to act as high-speed, high-precision knitting machines!

“To think that I would encounter knee socks in a fantasy world. This is my first time encountering them at all, y’know? Come to think of it, should I say, *nice to meet you, knee socks?*”

Of course, I’d seen girls wear them before, but a teenage boy couldn’t just stare at girl’s thighs without coming across as a massive pervert. So yeah, this was my first time touching knee socks.

“There’s still something pervy about a teenage boy knitting a pair of knee socks...pervy and sad.”

As I inflicted emotional damage on myself, I practiced by making a school track jacket first. All my classmates had them, and Miss Armor Rep was a little jealous.

“She probably feels left out at the girls’ meetings, but I doubt that a school tracksuit would look good on someone as tall and gorgeous as Miss Greedy Bombshell.”

I gave her the finished jacket, and she was so thrilled she changed into it right away. She went to the girls’ meeting still wearing it. I had to admit that my doubts were unfounded. It looked amazing on her, and she was overjoyed. Plus, there was something a bit sexy to that look.

After finishing one pair of knee socks, I got into a groove and started mass-producing them. Soon enough, stockings joined the production queue. *What kind of fantasy world are we in again?*

There was something unseemly about a teenage boy sitting alone in a bedroom with piles and piles of knee socks and stockings floating around him. I definitely looked like a creep.

“This is a trap! How do I keep getting caught?! The Trap Ring and my Trap Sense skill are both useless! It’s too late now! I’m finished!”

Light shone through a stocking like a dagger stabbing my reputation to death.

“I’m still gonna get Miss Armor Rep to wear them, though. How could I resist her in knee socks?”

Well, this was kind of a mess. I only meant to make one pair of knee socks, and I ended up mass-producing stockings in a variety of patterns. I tried switching up the thread colors as an experiment and ended up with all kinds of patterns: checks, stripes, chain...even argyle! That one wasn’t easy!

“So, it has come to this. I am a simple teenage boy with simple needs, after all. Besides, they hardly use any material, so they’re eco-friendly! Anyway, I merely wanted Miss Armor Rep to try a pair on and ended up starting a damn stocking factory.”

A spiral of magic hands worked in the air, weaving fishnet stockings all around me in a perverse orbit. I felt like I should repent, but I had no regrets!

DAY 52

NIGHT

If they're worried about my influence, then they gotta start by carrying their own weight.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

INTERLUDE: GIRLS' MEETING

WE COULDN'T SETTLE on whether we should take a day off tomorrow because there was a serious problem: unkillable monsters. Haruka-kun discovered them. If Angelica couldn't defeat them, then we had no hope, even if we went past level 100.

"It's like the Sphinx back in the Ultimate Dungeon—except without any weaknesses!"

"We can never beat something like that!"

"Never-ending monsters...now that's traumatic. I'm traumatized."

"Angelica sliced through the immortal Sphinx in a single stroke, but she couldn't do anything about this!"

Even the former dungeon emperor couldn't defeat it. She didn't suffer a single scratch, but she couldn't win either. Haruka-kun mentioned it briefly while he grilled burgers, saying that the dungeon king on the 60th floor was really tough, but it was far worse than I imagined.

"So why was he talking about how lucky they were? Can we really call that luck?!"

"It's a miracle that we're alive right now!"

"If we went with him, we would be dead right now, no doubt about it!"

According to him, it was just luck. Should we all bow down before his epic luck? If we did that, I had the feeling we'd end up enslaved. *Maybe we dodged a bullet there.*

"50th floor and over is off-limits, huh?"

"Yup, not until we get stronger!"

If we'd gone down with him, we would've all died, and Haruka-kun too. We had to take his advice seriously—we were too weak.

It was pure coincidence—a miracle, really. We decided to take a break from that dungeon after the 50th floor to go clear a different dungeon, where we ended up meeting Slimey. Also, where Haruka-kun found a book that gave him the knowledge he needed to defeat the Sand Giant. Because of how strong Slimey was as an ally, nobody died. It worked out this time, but the whole situation was a nightmare.

If Haruka-kun hadn't suddenly gotten worried, we all would've died. I couldn't believe we let Haruka-kun, Miss Armor Rep, and Slimey march into that disaster.

None of us were level 100 yet. But even if we were, there were still monsters out there that we couldn't defeat.

And we were still unsure just how strong we would become at level 100. If we didn't get strong enough, then Haruka-kun would have to keep fighting by himself. The only thing we could do now was to keep leveling up. But— A knocking at the door interrupted my thoughts.

"Come on in," I called.

It was Angelica. Now the girls-only meeting could truly begin. She needed to give us more details about the fight with the Sand Giant. After all, nothing Haruka-kun had said made any sense.

His terrible explanation: "It didn't die, so I just started shaking it? Well, not like vibrations, if you know what I mean, but like particle physics? If the particles accelerated too fast, we'd have all died, y'know? Excessive atomic agitation and radical motions are kind of dangerous, y'know?"

We had long ago given up on listening to him. It was impossible to follow.

Besides, we wanted to ask her about other sorts of radical motions. They sounded dangerous, especially for innocent maidens!

When I saw her, I said, “Hey, we match!”

Angelica-san was wearing a school track jacket like ours. Our jackets were a little different from hers. Hers looked shinier, and the material had a slightly different texture—maybe because it was brand new. She hadn’t borrowed one from anyone, which could only mean Haruka-kun made it.

“Oh my god, you look so good!”

“Even in our school jacket!”

“It goes great with your blonde hair and blue eyes!”

Everyone still had their school clothes, and a lot of girls wore the jackets at night because they were comfortable. Of course she had felt a little left out—I should’ve realized sooner. She had to have felt like she wasn’t truly one of us, so Haruka-kun made her one. She could finally feel like a member of the team. But when did he learn how to make track jackets?

“Your legs are so long.”

“You have such a narrow waist, too!”

“And your neck is so slender and your face is perfect!”

“Not fair!”

According to Angelica-san, Haruka-kun was busy making something else.

Could he have figured out how to knit recently? No, his tentacles—his creepy magic hands—had to be doing most of the work. For some reason, Haruka-kun and his tentacles were boon companions, his best friends, so close that they were one. *Why is he trying to master how to use tentacles?*

“Long...tubes? He knit,” said Angelica.

“Do you mean tights?” I asked.

“Or like...high socks?” Shimazaki-san said.

Fukunuki-san smirked and said, “He just skipped over making short socks, huh?”

“Does this mean he’s got, like, a new product that’s about to drop?!”

“What could it be?”

“And when will it go on sale?!”

We couldn’t help ourselves, even though we were all broke. Of course, we had no money because of one particular ruthless merchant.

“They were...black. Long, like this?” Angelica-san gestured.

“Hmm, so not just tights?”

She seemed to describe both long socks and short tights. She was indicating that whatever they were, her legs were longer. *Wait, up to the thighs? I knew it! He’s guilty! That dirty dog!*

“Knee socks!”

“Thigh-highs, of course!”

That explained everything. Without a doubt, Haruka-kun wanted Angelica to wear something new tonight!

“He’s making a bunch of knee socks?”

“I want some! I only have them in black.”

“Let’s put in orders right away!”

“More orders! I want knee socks!”

Everyone wanted to buy them, even though they weren’t just broke, they were swimming in debt!

Angelica continued to gesture and haltingly explain.

“He’s making lace, too?”

“Some sort of stretchy knit, similar to our jackets?”

“Like a stockinette stitch!”

“They were...thin. Shows skin,” said Angelica.

A stretchy, lacy knit made from a material similar to our jackets, and they were like socks? Something sheer...*he's making stockings!*

There was always only one truth, and only one culprit! *Guilty, guilty, guilty! Pre-emptively guilty!*

"Can you even make stockings without silk or nylon?"

"He's probably testing it out right now."

"I'll just be happy to have tights."

"I'm buying some—I don't care how much debt I rack up!"

He was too embarrassed to take our orders for underwear, but he went ahead and made knee socks. *Haruka-kun, don't you realize now you're going to get orders for stockings? You've sealed your own fate.*

Angelica-san left, heading towards Haruka-kun's room to try out the new product. Some time had passed since. He probably couldn't resist after she put them on, that much was for certain. It was still uncertain whether he wanted to see her try them on or take them off. Either way, she wasn't coming back any time s—there she was.

"Oh, you're back already."

"I knew it was knee socks."

Angelica-san came in carrying a large bundle of knee socks. They were already in the mass-production phase. Angelica-san changed into a new outfit, a mini dress with stockings. *Hang on, he made patterned stockings?!*

"That's super cute!"

"I love the patterns."

"The dress is cute, too! And sexy!"

"Time to get in a few more orders!"

"But how do I choose? There are too many options!"

"I want them all!"

There were plenty of knee socks and stockings for us to try on. Angelica-san handed something to Vice Rep A...were those fishnets?!

“The fabric’s not as stretchy as I’m used to, so I’ll have to be careful putting them on,” Vice Rep A said. “Hey, they’re prismatic! If they can handle channeling MP, they’re probably more durable than they look, and they fit perfectly. They’re kind of risqué, aren’t they?”

“No kidding! And those denim shorts are deadly!”

Vice Rep A had changed into a pair of Daisy Dukes and fishnet stockings that went up to mid-thigh. She looked like a dancer or something, but there was no way she could wear that in public! Why were they sized so perfectly for her?

“He made fishnet stockings?!”

“She looks so mature!”

“It’s literally lingerie.”

We’d all lounged around with bare legs before, but even though we were now showing less skin, we looked way more indecent! Especially Angelica-san, with her mini dress and patterned stockings, and Vice Rep A, with the aforementioned denim shorts and fishnets—they looked downright smutty.

“Oh my god, a see-through stripe pattern?! That’s so hot!”

“You two look like idols!”

“Lace stockings look so gorgeous and elegant but I can’t deny their eroticism!”

The compliments came pouring in, and we all admired the fabrics used, but the socks definitely seemed a bit too mature for us.

“My first time wearing knee socks, and it’s in a fantasy world!”

“They look great.”

“I’d be way too shy to wear these back in Japan!”

“Yeah, but we can get away with it here! There’s no one around who would judge us!”

None of us could have gotten away with wearing this stuff in the real world, but we had no reason to feel bashful in this one. No one would care.

“This is the best!”

When we were summoned to this world, we tried to forget about fashion and wearing nice clothes. We all assumed that we would just get used to the rustic, itchy clothes of this world. Now, not only did we have modern fashions, but we could wear stockings and knee socks if we chose!

I used to reminisce about clothes from the real world, how I had wished that I could wear something one more time, the things I never got to try on. But those feelings were gone now.

“Thank you, Angelica-san.”

“O-okay.”

We thanked her, the kind spy on our side, who relayed all of our wants and regrets to Haruka-kun. Stuck in a fantasy world, we had tried to forget the past, our dreams and hopes from Japan...but now, we could be happy. Sure, we looked like we were about to do a photoshoot for a men’s magazine, but this was a no-guys-allowed fashion show just for us.

We had assumed we’d never in our entire lives get a chance to wear lingerie or sexy, adult clothing, that having those experiences was just a half-remembered dream from another world. Even so, every piece of clothing we had was somehow scandalous.

“He said we can have three samples per person?!”

“Yes!”

“How can I even choose?”

“There’s only one solution: let’s try on everything!”

I remembered thinking about what kind of clothing I would wear when I became an adult. When we were thrown into a medieval fantasy land, we were prepared to abandon those dreams—only for them to come true in a remote inn in another world. That was why we were so excited. The moments we thought were lost forever had reappeared before our very eyes.

“It’s a trap! Trying anything on just makes me want all of it!”

“Three isn’t nearly enough!”

Angelica even agreed to lend us her dresses and saucy outfits, leading to further chaos. With no sense of propriety, we freely swapped dresses and outfits. This scene was a secret only meant for pure-hearted maidens. If anyone had seen us, they would need to be taken care of. Permanently.

“I’m so tired!”

“But so happy.”

“No kidding.”

We kept trying on different outfits late into the night, gossiping and trading clothes. When we finally settled on what we wanted, every last one of us was utterly exhausted and content. Even so, we couldn’t wear these clothes in public. They were way too revealing. That didn’t stop me from ordering more, though.

This whole duchy was wracked with poverty and the struggle for survival. Fashion was unknown here...until now.

The frontier knew peace for the first time. Life became easier. People had enough to get by. The town became wealthy, and shops displayed cute clothing and accessories in their windows. Things that the people of this town could never have dreamed of buying had now become accessible.

The townsfolk couldn’t make sense of this situation. The concept of fashion didn’t exist here—everyone lived their lives only thinking about surviving to the next dawn. Something so unfamiliar as luxuries baffled them. The local women cared about their appearances in their own way, but this was too radical a change—they were left behind.

They didn’t know what to do with all these styles they couldn’t have even dreamed of. It left them in a state of stunned perplexity.

Haruka-kun introduced modern fashion to a medieval countryside. They had hundreds of years of catching up to do.

On our days off, we were the center of attention in town. Although we were only ordinary modern teenagers, not particularly wealthy or stylish, we were at the very height of fashion in a town like this.

Of course, Shimazaki-san and her friends made us look far more impressive. They were all tall and beautiful, with attractive faces, long limbs, and a great sense of style. They were magazine models back in our world. Those girls were each an expert in their own right. We had become better friends since arriving here, and they acted as stylists for us, going so far as to coordinate our outfits every morning.

So yeah, we stood out a little. We could even be called influencers.

According to the guild receptionist, people looked up to us, and anything we wore became trendy. The women of Omui scrimped and saved in order to dress like us.

Every day, they worked hard and built up savings so that they could buy the clothes of their dreams. Our every outfit and fashion choice was an object of scrutiny.

That was why we would absolutely not wear fishnet stockings in public.

Haruka-kun, with his first nuclear experiments, had become not just a destroyer of worlds, but a destroyer of public decency.

DAY 52

NIGHT

Why are my skills trying to hide and deceive me, and why do I need to figure out how they work in order to reveal them?!

THE WHITE LOSER INN

THIS IS MERE SPECULATION, but I had the distinct suspicion that I was going to get scolded.

Knee socks might have been pushing it, stockings were a smidge over the line, but patterned stockings were too much. Fishnet tights guaranteed my doom. Although, it might have been too late for me—my reputation was doomed when I decided to stay up all night making fishnet stockings.

“Well, I already made them, so I might as well sell them. I’m sure they’ll sell. I’m not sure when the girls will wear them, but they’ve already ordered plenty of sexy dresses.”

Considering how many revealing clothes I’d sold to date, sexy stockings and fishnet tights were sure to fly off the shelves. Nonetheless, I would still definitely get an earful about my priorities!

Miss Armor Rep came over before to tell me that they wanted samples, so I just went ahead and gave her stockings and knee socks, including a pair of fishnet tights I made especially for Vice Rep A. I didn’t make them on purpose, I swear!

Unfortunately, nothing damaged the reputation of a teenage boy quite like staying up all night to make lingerie. My appeal was subatomic by now.

That was why I engaged in smoke screen tactics. The best place to hide a leaf is in a forest, after all. So long as I made a mountain of clothes, I could claim that it was only inevitable that I made some socks, stockings, and fishnet tights—pure happenstance, nothing more. They’d still lecture me, but at least I had a

credible excuse! Even though I knew that the girls would get mad at me, the stockings and socks still served a legitimate purpose—in the bedroom, obviously!

I went through all the trouble of prototyping knits for Miss Armor Rep's tracksuit, so now I wanted to make some skirts. Something stretchy with a flowy silhouette would look good, so I tried making long flared skirts. Yeah, it seemed stylish. I also made a long, tight skirt with a slit, just for Miss Armor Rep.

"Now we're talking! I can't wait to see her wearing this...then taking it off. But she's gotta put it on, first! We all knew this would happen. I'm so predictable, but I made some knit miniskirts, too!"

It was inevitable. *I'm a teenage boy, what did you expect?*

I also made some dresses and hoodies. The dresses would have to be Miss Armor Rep exclusives, since they were a bit risqué. Honestly, I made them that way on purpose, so that they would reveal all of her curves. It had a row of buttons down the front. If some of the buttons were left unfastened, it gave the dress a slit, and if they were all unfastened, things would get exciting! I could already feel myself getting scolded for this.

The girls-only meeting seemed like it would go on for a long while. They were deciding whether or not to take the day off tomorrow. Apparently, the guys had no say in the matter. The nerds were oblivious, and the meatheads were stupid, so it seemed like the right call. Even so, the Class Rep consulted Miss Armor Rep during dinner but didn't see the point in consulting me.

She even asked for *Slimey's* opinion! In response, Slimey jiggled. Was that a yes or no?

"I can just delay the general store lady's orders. There's literally no end to them!"

I caught a glimpse with Jupiter Eye—there was literally an order for a house.

"Why is the general store lady ordering a house? Who requisitions a house at a general store?! Oh, I'll deliver a house! I'll deliver it right in the middle of her store!"

I had some spare time, and it had been a while since I checked. *Surely, I've leveled up by now.*

“Okay, here we go... Status.”

NAME: Haruka

RACE: Human

Lv: 21

JOB: —

HP: 378

MP: 429

VIT: 336

POW: 339

SPE: 431

DEX: 418

MIN: 428

INT: 459

LUK: Max (Above Limit)

SP: 2932

COMBAT SKILLS: Peerless Cane Mastery Lv8, Avoid Lv6, Magic Entanglement Lv6, Life or Death Lv9, Rapid Movement Lv9, Bubble Lv6, Eye Mastery Lv1, Diamond Fist Lv3

MAGIC: Decay Lv2, Teleport Lv7, Gravity Lv6, Holding Lv6, Four Elements Sorcery Lv6, Wood Lv8, Lightning Lv9, Ice Lv9, Alchemy Lv4, Void Lv2

SKILLS: General Health Lv9, Sensitivity Lv9, Body Manipulation Lv8, Walking Mastery Lv7, Servitude Lv9, Uncover Lv5, Magic Control Lv8, Presence Concealment Lv8, Stealth Lv9, Hiding LvMax, Insentience Lv7, Physical-Proof Lv2, MP Absorption Lv5, Revival Lv5, Supreme Thinking Lv6, Dash Lv8, Airwalk Lv7, Overclock Lv9, Jupiter Eye Lv4, Super Horny Lv8, Alpha Male Lv8

TITLES: Shut-In Lv8, NEET Lv8, Loner Lv8, Bane Sorcerer Lv4, Sword Master Lv3, Alchemist Lv4

ABILITIES: Corporate Proactiveness Lv8, Master of None Lv9, Blockhead Lv9

**EQUIPMENT: Wooden Staff?, Clothes Set?, Leather Glove?, Leather Boots?, Cloak?, Jupiter Eye, Ring of the Destitute, Item Bag, Monster Bracelet
Power+44% Speed+33%, Vitality+24%, Black Hat**

I'd actually leveled up twice since I last checked. This also happened when I finally reached level 10—my level increased multiple times. Maybe I had to fulfill a level-up condition every ten levels. If so, there was probably some unfulfilled condition preventing my classmates from reaching level 100.

The biggest change was the appearance of Decay Lv2. It probably appeared because I finally understood the principle underlying both Heat and Vibration magic.

As further proof, I now knew Void magic.

"As I suspected, now that I know the basis of Teleport, I gained that skill. Why do I have to deduce how my skills work to gain new skills?"

This fantasy world surpassed my imagination. Reading my status was completely unreliable!

"Why are my skills trying to trick me? Why do I need to figure out how they work in order to even see them?! I've never heard of skills that trick their user like this! They just show up because I know they have to exist. I see right through you, sneaky skills!"

A fantasy world where your own skills mocked you and hid from your own status screen. It was too fantastical.

Magic Control was up to level 8, which was two levels up from the last time I checked. It was a promoted skill, too. That was incredibly fast growth for a promoted skill.

Likely, it leveled when I used Teleport, Gravity, Holding, and Decay against the Sand Giant. I had to keep using Magic Control to prevent a nuclear meltdown,

so it gained a ludicrous amount of experience.

Similarly, Insentience, the promoted version of Focus, was already level 7, two levels more compared to last time. I had to use an incredible amount of concentration to reign in the magic.

I was getting through dangerous situations by sheer luck as usual, but I'd still be screwed if I lost control of Teleport or Decay. There would be no excusing accidentally teleporting inside of a solid wall or accidentally setting off a nuke.

"Well, I guess if I somehow misuse Gravity, I might create a black hole and destroy the entire planet. I'm better off not thinking about that! This is a fantasy world, I'm sure I'll be fine!"

If I was in a science fiction setting, then that would be a real concern, but this wasn't a scientific, rational world, so I didn't care. *In this situation, if I think about it, I'm liable to make it happen. Better not.*

Super Horny and Alpha Male had both shot up to level 8. To be fair, Revival gave me limitless stamina, and I used those skills constantly. Speaking of Revival, it also went up two levels. *Makes sense.* Though I had never gotten injured, Revival had no problems leveling up. This was proof that it really helped me out at night!

Oh well. I couldn't understand any of it anyway. I had never understood anything even once by looking at my Status since I got here. I didn't understand the conditions for improving skills—except for Super Horny and Alpha Male.

Moving on, I checked the endless list of orders from the general store. *I'll just pretend I didn't see that order for a house.* I mean, how was I supposed to put a house inside the store? Actually, that sounded like a challenge!

"I don't think building houses can be called a side gig. It's definitely not a crafting skill."

I needed to teach the general store lady the definitions of "general store" and "side job" once and for all, I thought. She probably thought running a general store just meant coming up with a list of goods and handing me the order sheet! She acted like writing *urgent* on an order form was a magic word to make everything happen instantly! This time, she had written URGENT on every

single one!

“I can’t believe she made an ‘urgent’ order for mushroom burgers! Everyone ate all the burgers I made—does she expect me to start over from scratch? Besides, how were three burgers per person not enough? They even ate the burger I was saving for myself! I can’t tell you how agonizing it was to watch the tears of nostalgic joy run down their cheeks while they ate *my* burger! Though I did make a lot of money, I guess?”

Those burgers produced a perfect, sorrowful recollection, a nostalgia for the Earth. I would have to make them again.

Supreme Thinking was still investigating the Treasure of the Monster Core for me, and it couldn’t figure anything out either.

“So, is the Treasure of the Monster Core meant for fighting monsters that could split their core up like in the last dungeon? That doesn’t make any damn sense! I couldn’t have used it without defeating the Sand Giant first!”

Regardless, I wanted to at least figure out a use for the Treasure. I figured that it was a one-of-a-kind item, but if it wasn’t, I would like to come up with some countermeasures.

“When will the girls decide whether or not tomorrow is a day off? If they don’t finish their meeting tonight, who’s to say what’s going on tomorrow?”

I would hate it if our day off was only announced after the day was over.

DAY 52

NIGHT

I need work to earn money, so I'll never be free from my side job!

INTERLUDE: THE DUKE'S PALACE

“SEND A MESSENGER to the inn at dawn. Figure out when the boy is free, and bring him here. Act with politeness and discretion!”

Dungeons were getting cleared one after another according to the Guild's daily reports. Moreover, these dungeons reached the middle and lower strata, and had a greater risk of overflowing.

There was only one possibility: that boy and his comrades were involved. Normally, I would not permit anyone to intervene, as we would only get in their way, but I was in desperate need of that lad's assistance. It pained me to ask for help, but our resources could not keep up with the pace of development. Especially gold, which was only a few days away from total depletion. On the other hand, we had far more lumber than we could use.

We were clear-cutting the forest of monsters at an incredible rate—we were well ahead of schedule. There were even reports of demonic scythes carving a swathe of carnage through the woods, felling monsters and trees in equal measure. That lad conquered dungeons every day, and cleared land from the forest. Furthermore, he built a pseudo-dungeon to protect the frontier from invaders.

Though he was certainly busy, I hoped that he would help us excavate some tunnels to accord with his development proposal. The plans for iron mines even specified, “Excavation: 1 million ele per hour,” and he provided a special invoice form for the job.

“Indeed, 'tis a good bargain,” I murmured. “In his proposal, he estimated that it would only require three hours to finish the work, for a total cost of three

million ele. Typically, miners and quarry workers set their rates per annum, not by the hour.”

An attendant leaned over and informed me, “Our supplies won’t arrive in time. We must ask for the boy’s help.”

He was right, we needed to burden the boy once more. We could never afford to repay his generosity.

That lone lad carried the burden of responsibility previously carried by generations of dukes in the frontier. How utterly shameful that I should ask more of him! Such conduct spits in the face of decency!

Though I had only ever repaid the boy for all his services to the frontier with worthless words of gratitude, I needed him once again. I didn’t know how I could ask him.

“My Lord, are you not overthinking...?”

I could not improve the lives of my people on my own, yet they had finally found happiness. Fortune had at last smiled on my poor duchy.

My most fervent wish was that I could improve the life of at least one more person. I wanted nothing more than to hear the ringing laughter of the townsfolk as they led contented lives.

Did that make me a selfish duke? Without a doubt. Nonetheless, I would do everything in my power to achieve that goal! Unfortunately, there were too many things that only the boy could achieve.

I intended to burden him with even more responsibilities, though he owed us nothing, though the suffering of the frontier needn’t have meant anything to him.

“I have no means to repay him, yet I will insist on using him to bring joy to my realm. Can you not see that I have shown no regard for *his* happiness?!”

“Erm, well, the boy frequently visits the guild to complain that he doesn’t have a job, and he insists that his services are not expensive, my lord.”

His proposals were sure to guide the duchy into a golden age. Recently, he brought us stacks of instructive texts on the arts of agriculture and medicine.

The sluggishness of our progress must have weighed heavy on his heart.

How much responsibility could he bear alone? How much suffering? Yet...this was the only way. We were helpless without him.

“Duke Meropapa, a messenger from the guild has arrived. Shall I bring her in?”

It was the young receptionist from the guild, and her next words chilled me to my marrow.

“Two more dungeons have reportedly perished,” she said. “We’ll confirm the reports tomorrow. There was an issue with the dungeon king of one of them. Please look at this, sir.”

An undying Sand Giant—this *was* a problem. It was a monster that couldn’t be slain, that could summon an endless army of sand soldiers!

“Th-this—no! Summon my military commanders at once!”

“There’s no need for panic, sir. It was destroyed! You can see it in the report: ‘I couldn’t kill it, so I disintegrated it, y’know? Normally you can’t kill it, so keep your eyes peeled.’ There is no mistake, the monster was unkillable. The interpreter confirmed as much.”

It was a monster that only the boy could defeat. To date, no one else had discovered a means. Once more, the boy dealt with a threat to the frontier. It pained me to even contemplate how many burdens we inflicted on him.

The receptionist, who knew the boy well, resolutely continued her statement.

“If the boy says he wants to work, his request is sincere. He simply doesn’t have any money. The boy cannot hold onto a single ele for more than a day. He would appreciate the offer of work.”

How could he not have money? Even slaying a single dungeon king—conquering one, single dungeon—should have given him immeasurable wealth. Defeating dungeons that reached the middle strata day after day should have made him wealthy beyond imagining. After defeating the Ultimate Dungeon, the boy should have been rich enough to buy the entire duchy out from under me!

Though he spread wealth and goods across the frontier, the boy lacked money? Did he simply donate all of his wealth to revivify our economy?

Omui had been transformed. The good cheer echoing through the streets served as a veritable symbol of our prosperity. Indeed, the women of our humble berg now dressed in finery that put the very capital of the Kingdom to shame.

Through the general store, financed and rebuilt by the lad, spread the wealth and good cheer our town despaired for. It was the beating heart of the frontier economy: buying the specialized produce of poor rural villages, enabling them to prosper, and providing a heretofore unimagined variety of affordable trade goods to the people of Omui. It bought what couldn't be sold, and sold goods at a price anyone could afford. That trading company had the miraculous effect of spreading wealth to all.

"Though that boy blessed our land in prosperity, he is destitute. That is an unforgiveable sin!"

How could someone responsible for such immeasurable wealth be bankrupt?

"Please make no mistake," the receptionist said, "He earns an immeasurable fortune every day and spends it all before the sun sets. Invariably, he is penniless by nightfall. Though any other person would think it too much money to spend, he somehow manages. By all accounts, the boy is hopeless in this regard. At least, so I have heard from his interpreters."

Though the frontier was poor, we had great tracts of land, and the region was dotted with numerous small villages and hamlets. Providing supplies for all of them would require an outrageous sum of money.

"Do not tell me that he spends his entire fortune on improving our duchy! I cannot ignore that money and trade have begun to circulate throughout the realm. One of the boy's proposals pertained to this matter; he called it an 'economic stimulus package.' Is that what this is? Has he single-handedly funded this *stimulus package*?"

I could not make heads nor tails of this strange science, "economics." He

produced a pamphlet meant to explain the matter, but it was challenging to say the least.

“According to the bureaucrats of commerce, they understand the principles of ‘economics,’ but they do not know what it actually is. His explanation was merely, ‘Sell stuff to make money, and buy more stuff, y’know? If you can’t sell, you can’t buy. If you can’t make some junk to sell, you won’t be able to buy anything, and then you’re poor. It’s just trading, y’know?’ I suspect that this is a definition of economics.”

If you can’t sell, you become poor, I thought. Was that why the boy traded with all the villages? Was that the birth of local industry? Those boys and girls, barely thirty in number, brought all of this to us with their wealth. Our realm was reborn because of their sacrifices, and they continued to live in the depths of poverty.

If this was truly the case, my shame could know no boundaries. No matter how many taxes we gathered, we could never pay them back. Even were we to collect a massive hoard of wealth from every village in the land, it would be a trifling and pitiful recompense.

Oh, the absurdity! They shouldered a grave responsibility without thanks, a responsibility that grew with each passing day!

Even if we tried to pay them back, they would only bless us all the more with their favor!

“If I may...you have possibly misapprehended his motivations,” the receptionist said. “That boy is simply living his life as he pleases. He found poverty and suffering to be a source of irritation, so he improved our lots, and our town flourished. Though our town was happy, the rest of the duchy continued to suffer, so he decided to improve their lives as well. There’s no deeper meaning to that boy’s actions. According to his interpreters, he claims, ‘I’m not a fan of misery, poverty, and tragedy, so I’m getting rid of them, y’know?’ Nothing more than that. Wiping out misery, poverty, and tragedy is sure to make the world a happier place. Hence, there’s no more meaning to his actions. It’s a waste of time to think about that boy.”

Having said her piece, the guild receptionist departed.

Could he truly have improved the lives of the frontier folk for no reason? Was it that simple? I could hardly conceive that someone would do all this just because they were annoyed by the troubles of others.

But even if his actions weren't motivated by any higher ideal, he still made the frontier a better place for all. That was meaningful, and it was still worthy of praise!

Even if he did not seek any compensation...I had an obligation as the Duke of Omui to show him true and proper gratitude! Though it was unasked for, unsought, I would give him my thanks!

DAY 53

MORNING

Is there really a point to signing a contract with some people whose names you don't even remember?

THE WHITE LOSER INN

“**K**NEE SOCKS without stripes? What's even the point?!” Nerd A shouted. I kicked him in the shin.

“Striped knee socks need a matching pair of striped panties!” Nerd B felt the justice of my foot as well.

“Knee socks need to be paired with animal ears for a tru—” I didn't even let Nerd C finish before smacking him.

“You degenerates! Everyone knows that knee socks look best on little girls!” With a series of violent thumps, I showed Nerd D no mercy. *He needs to be on a registry!*

Ugh, the nerds were annoying me first thing in the morning. They kept geeking out about knee socks and debating each other's bad opinions. I should burn them all. I'd been kicking their asses all morning, but the message wasn't getting through.

“Why are you obsessing over knee socks? Are you gonna wear them? Don't think I won't call the cops on you!”

“I don't want to wear them! I'm *just saying*, stripes are superior!”

Was seeing all the girls wearing knee socks too much for their fragile nerd brains?

To be fair, seeing Miss Armor Rep in a pair of thigh-high stockings last night shook me to my core, and I eagerly returned the favor...she told me off the next morning!

“I get it, some things are simply too marvelous to ignore, y’know? I mean, we’re all high school boys, right? Although I doubt we’ll ever get to graduate, at this rate.”

Jiggle jiggle.

The nerds kept pestering me, the girls kept lecturing me, and the meatheads kept nagging me to make them some tracksuits.

Why did my refreshing, invigorating mornings always devolve into chaos? It had been a *very* refreshing night. I was invigorated by Miss Armor Rep’s absolute territory all night long!

“Bro, make me a tracksuit with a badass leopard logo! Leopards are cool,” Meathead A said.

“I’m not gonna make you a brand-name knockoff! That’s not my style, y’know? You’re already wearing a Puma track jacket. Why would you want a fake? Don’t tell me, do you mean leopard print?! Are you trying to look like the world’s lamest delinquent? What are you going to do in a fantasy world, hang out in front of a convenience store at night? You’re not going to find any convenience stores around here! How do you not know the difference between pumas, leopards, and panthers? Isn’t Puma your favorite brand? Maybe a leopard should bite your head off, how about that? I’d have to persuade a puma to chew on a head that stupid. There’s no way idiocy tastes good!”

Why do idiots like tracksuits so much? One of them said that his favorite brand was the one with four stripes! *The moron can’t even count.*

Another claimed that he was sponsored by “that one brand that used the old-school family crest with a bunch of diamonds.” Did he think that the Takeda clan was a sportswear company?

“Please don’t tell me that you think the Takeda clan has anything to do with tracksuits! Do you seriously think Takeda Shingen came back from the dead to run an Italian sportswear brand?! Who would ever sign a sponsorship deal with someone as idiotic as you?” I turned back to the first meathead and continued, “And you! There isn’t a brand that uses a pigeon for a logo, either! How did you

confuse a rooster with a pigeon?! Why can't any of you even remember the names of the companies sponsoring you? You're all claiming you've got brand loyalty, but you'd be perfectly happy wearing tracksuits with counterfeit logos!"

They were so persistent that I decided I would make tracksuits for them with "Suprdumbe" branding. Seriously, when all the groups gave themselves names, they decided that "The Dumbasses" sounded cool and went with that.

"As ridiculously stupid as you are, you've convinced me!"

Wiggle wiggle.

Of course, I wouldn't make the nerds any knee socks. No matter how many times I kicked them, booted them, or walloped them, they came running back, bellowing about striped knee socks at the tops of their lungs. *This is a safety hazard! A nerd hazard!*

"I guess I have no choice but to scorch them. Even zombies are more reasonable."

"But striped knee socks! C'mon!"

There was no escaping the lectures, either. Today was supposed to be a day off, but the lecturers never rested. They were available for any scolding sessions 24/7. That was the kind of work ethic needed for my side gigs.

"You need to make clothes that have a positive influence on the women of Omui!"

"Yes, everyone is working so hard to buy the clothes you make!"

"You need to make clothes that are both cute and *wholesome!*"

"Like striped knee s—" Nerd A was silenced with a glare. "N-never mind!"

The girls wouldn't permit me to sell my new products, but they had already bought everything I'd already made. I didn't see the problem. Apparently fishnet stockings weren't wholesome?

"What will become of this town if all the women started traipsing around in fishnets and denim short shorts?!"

"It's indecent!"

“They’re far too lewd! Banned!”

Personally, I’d be thrilled if all the women started wearing fishnet tights, but I couldn’t say that out loud.

As I was enduring my lecture, Miss Armor Rep handed me a list of orders: twenty pairs of fishnets, and more than one hundred orders for stockings with sexy patterns.

They bought up all the knee socks I made and still dared to scold me. The only logical explanation for this was that my approval rating had become so minuscule that it collapsed into nonexistence.

However, I had prepared a secret plan—a strategy to overcome this desperate situation! I would never be so foolish as to face a lecture without a plan. I didn’t suffer through daily scoldings for nothing!

“If I may respond to these accusations, I did not go out of my way to make provocative apparel. This is simply stereotyping me as a teenage boy! Consider the evidence, y’know? I have made many styles of garments, and you can only point to a few instances where they could be considered indecent. The knee socks and tights were purely incidental! I’ve explained this over sixty times by now. I am and have always been an innocent high school boy, and I deny all accusations.”

As I professed my innocence, I unveiled my newest clothing line—the Excuse series, all made of stretch fabrics. I left all the erotic outfits out.

I was saving them for Miss Armor Rep, after all: a knit bodycon dress with matching stockings! *I’m a genius!*

“Stretch fabrics!”

“Those are so cute!”

“Definitely chic.”

“That’s what I’m saying! With my newly developed jersey knit fabric, I present to you a new line of skirts and dresses, pre-orders limited to three items per person. As an early-bird special, I’ll let each of you take two sample garments free. See, I’m not the bad guy here! Nothing ever comes from you all fighting

over who gets what first, but it always seems to prove my innocence, so...first come, first served, I guess?”

I convinced them that they were getting a good deal by giving them a couple freebies, a flawless sales strategy. I calculated that they’d each try to buy five garments minimum.

“Hands off, that’s mine!”

“No, I saw the flared skirt first! We were meant for each other! It’s my destiny, my chosen one, my soulmate, my everything! Mine, mine, mine!”

“Please, please, please can I just have that one? I look great in hoodies—starting from today!”

“No miniskirts?”

“Huh? Did someone just run off with one?”

“No fair, she’s using a skill!”

“I’m not letting that miniskirt get away!”

“Wahhh!”

Jiggle jiggle?!

I was free to go, innocent of all crimes.

“Jersey’s a stretch fabric. You might not want to pull on it so much? Try not to use skills either, okay? Let’s not turn this into a bloodbath. I’m looking at you, Book Club President, with your illusions! You know they can see you with Presence Sensing. Watch out, someone’s using Ground Shrink to swipe that skirt!”

“Hiyaahhhh!”

Upon further reflection, I was confident that the girls would’ve found a way to slay the Sand Giant. *That is, if the Sand Giant was holding the last cute knit dress in stock.* The battlefield right now was borderline apocalyptic...they actually hid secret techniques from each other to gain an edge at the next bargain sale!

“Whoa, I just saw someone use Incarnate! Why didn’t you use it in the

dungeon? Why now?!"

"Here are some additional orders!" the Class Rep yelled, shoving some slips of paper in my face.

"Three per person is totally unfair! I can't choose!"

"That's just cruelty towards teenage girls!"

Boing boing!

They started chanting in protest in the middle of the dining hall! Should I start handing out placards?

At this rate I was going to be overwhelmed by marchers with signs like, "Miniskirts Are a Maiden's Right!" and "We Deserve Striped Knee Socks!" I mean, if they felt that strongly...

An elegant young lady I recognized suddenly caught my notice.

"Pardon me," she said, "I'm begging you, will any of you please listen to me? Oh, I do so hate to be ignored, I feel like I'm about to burst into tears! I've been here from the very beginning, but no one listened to me, no matter how I raised my voice! Ooh, and I would so love to have a miniskirt as well."

Whoa, it's the duke's daughter!

She was apparently trying to get my attention this entire time, but she couldn't be heard over the protests. Her eyes were dewy with tears, but if she thought that would help her in the Girls' Bargain War, she was sorely mistaken. She was in over her head. Even the Sand Giant wouldn't last for more than two minutes!

"As I have been *saying*, my father, the Duke, would like to request your assistance in excavating an iron mine. We are prepared to offer you full mining rights in exchange for digging the shafts. Father will personally give you the official request. When would be a good time for you? Sooner would be better... the same goes for my miniskirt, of course! Ooh, and I adore those long socks!"

Unsurprisingly, the frontier faced an iron shortage. Since all regular imports had stopped, naturally the most cumbersome materials to transport would run out first.

Stalker Girl had told me that smuggling large quantities of iron or cattle was impossible. Without raw materials, industrial development would slow down, and I would never get a chance to quit my side gigs! I had to fix this, quick!

Every night, it felt like my side job said, “You’ve activated my trap card!” the moment I entered my room. My side job was unbeatable in this world.

“Hmm, if that’s all, I’ll take care of it today. I’ve got nothing else going on since it’s my day off. Besides, I need to gather some metal, myself,” I said. “Oh, Merimeri? Can you tell your father, Meridad, that he doesn’t need to personally deliver his request? He’s a bit of a windbag, if you know what I mean. He spends so much time apologizing, but did he do wrong? He can come over if he wants to stand in for me when I get scolded. I’d be happy to have him do so. It’s twenty people’s worth of lectures.”

Glancing through the plan, it didn’t seem like too much work. Digging wouldn’t take very long, and I wanted to dig around that area myself. There might be something buried deep, maybe even mithril! If I held the mining rights, then I’d happily snap up any mithril I found. I would become a mithril magnate in no time!

“Ahem, he hasn’t done anything wrong, so I think he would forego the lecture. We would be very grateful if you could somehow do all this work today. Are you sure it’s possible? Won’t preparations take time? I am, of course, completely confident that you don’t remember my name—I am Merielle, *not* Merimeri. Though you are still somehow unaware of this, I would like to remind you that we are in the city of Omui. Incidentally, my father’s name Meropapa, not Meridad. Again, for the sake of clarity, my name is Merielle. Why is Merimeri the only thing that you can remember? I promise you, if you call me Merimeri one more time, I will weep!”

Today was fine with me. I would be finished by the afternoon, and Miss Armor Rep could hang out with the other girls in the meantime. Were they planning on going shopping again? After crushing the dungeon, the girls were already getting crushed—financially.

They were trapped in a debt spiral even though they easily made 50,000 ele a day, equivalent to 100,000 yen. Wasn’t their goal to make 250,000 ele per

month? They spent that much yesterday and today on clothing alone.

Considering that everything they bought was prismatic, it was actually a reasonable price. Besides, they were just going to confiscate all my profits and leave me with nothing more than some loose pocket change...again.

DAY 53

MORNING

Apparently, it's not easy to mine in a fantasy world if you turn the tunnel into a waterslide.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

MISS ARMOR REP and the girls did indeed decide to go shopping. She got all dressed up and I handed her a healthy wad of spending money so she could enjoy her day to the fullest.

Meanwhile, Slimey was going to go on a picnic with Stalker Girl and Poster Girl. They had packed a small mountain of food, so Slimey was certain to enjoy his picnic.

The nerds toddled off to the armory to try their hands at some smithing. I didn't expect much, but I gave them plenty of ingots to work with. They had cultivated an encyclopedic knowledge of blacksmithing in fantasy worlds, and the graybeard who ran the place was a legitimate smith. The nerds were just so...clumsy. They sucked at all handicrafts, despite their obvious talents at building model kits. Additionally, they were hopeless at fine art, but they could design anime characters well enough to get a manga artist on board. Somehow, I was confident that they could build a steam engine, even if they had no hope of forging a simple nail. That was the paradox of nerd enthusiasm.

Not that I cared, but the meatheads went off for a run in their new tracksuits. They were far too stupid for me to understand their plans. If I did, that'd make me an idiot myself.

Whatever it was, it was almost certainly moronic. *Correction: No "almost" about it.* This was an unassailable truth. The last time they took a day off, they got into a goblin wrestling match. As it turned out, they got along with the goblins since they were more or less on the same mental level. The meatheads felt totally comfortable around them. If you put a track jacket on a goblin, you

wouldn't even be able to tell the difference.

I stood before a precipitous cliff. All of the mountains in the region were like this, jagged and imposing.

"Should I start digging here and make my way to the village, or should I start at the other end? I don't recommend moving into a mineshaft, though."

"You can do as you please, but are you sure about this? Also, why would anyone move into a mineshaft? Do you understand the purpose of a mine?" asked Merimeri.

Starting from here seemed like the right move. Considering all the options, connecting the mining village to the cliffs near town was the best one.

"I'm basically picking the location with the most iron, but that also means the mine will stink of rust and the walls will develop this nasty reddish-brown patina. Are you sure you want to move in? Are you running away from home? You'll never be a shut-in if you become a runaway, y'know?"

"I still don't understand how you came to the conclusion that I have any desire to live in a mine!"

Channeling my magic, I sensed plenty of iron in this direction.

"By the way, since you're a noble and all, is it a good idea for you to have come out here all the way through the monster forest? If you ask me, going merry-merry in the mountains isn't exactly lady-like, y'know?"

Because my timetable was so urgent, she joined me at the base of the cliffs, but I kind of felt that a duke's daughter shouldn't be hanging around an iron mine.

"Did I come through a forest? If memory serves, and it does, the forest disappeared before I could even step foot in it. Did you not notice those giant evil scythes that flew ahead of us and mowed down not just the monsters, but the trees as well? Where did they come from?! And why would I merry-merry in the mountains? Are you going to merry-merry through stone? Do I look like a pickaxe to you? My name is Merielle, so stop saying Merimeri! I'll drown the

world with my tears if you don't stop!"

Thanks to my death scythes, we now had a road going straight to town. Starting from here would be faster, after all. In the proposal, they only requested that I complete the first stage, but it would be faster to complete all five stages of the planned mine at once. This was far more efficient than traveling to a remote mining village, excavating from that end, and stopping early. Why did they split their plan up into five stages, anyhow? I could easily do them all now.

"Let's begin."

"Okay."

My MP was fully recovered, but the MP battery in my item bag wasn't fully recharged, so I decided to dig slowly. Carving out the whole tunnel in one go would've been faster, but the MP costs became prohibitive. I conserved my MP better if I only dug through the stones right in front of me as I advanced.

I figured that I should prioritize the battery, just in case anything unexpected happened. I wasn't in a rush, after all.

Raising my hand in front of me, I began to form the tunnel with magic. I used Holding to shape the tunnel and Earth to dig. Normally, a vaulted tunnel would have been stable enough, but this was a mine, so I reinforced the walls and ceiling with stone pillars and crossbeams.

Merimeri stared. Picking her jaw up off the floor, she said, "H-how did that tunnel appear out of nowhere? What happened? This was sheer cliff mere moments ago!"

I was right, nobles had no business in a mine.

"Uh, I dug the tunnel? You hired me to do that, you know. Why are you surprised when I did what you asked? Oh, I think I understand. This tunnel is too plain for someone of your refined tastes! Should I add a slide? That might be fun, a slide going through a mine? I bet people would pay just to see that."

I couldn't believe that I didn't think of that myself! I should've expected such brilliance from a noble—turning the mine into a tourist attraction! The only flaw in the plan was that the slide would become steeper as we mined deeper into

the earth, and that would make it harder to transport the iron ore out.

Eureka! I needed a hydraulic system to transport the ore anyway, so I could turn it into a water slide!

“Would you please listen?! If you add a slide in the tunnel, miners could slip and fall! This could lead to injuries, and even death! Now is not the time for your tomfoolery! Your behavior will make the miners cry! And I’ll cry too!”

Huh? The young lady was saying something to me, apparently. Were miners not allowed to use slides?

I abandoned my plans for a water slide and continued to dig. Certainly, it would’ve been pretty difficult to manage a waterslide and a mining operation at the same time. People having fun on the waterslide would only get in the way of the miners, and though the miners would be able to enjoy the slide as well, no one would be left to do any work.

The tunnel was progressing better than expected. It was just a regular, old, boring tunnel, after all. There was no one around, but Merimeri looked pleased with her stretch miniskirt. Still, I suspected that wearing a miniskirt in a mine was unwise. What a shame—despite this world being full of beautiful women, miniskirts were unknown.

I merely wanted to correct this injustice and spread the good word of miniskirts, yet my classmates lectured me about “propriety!” No matter what I did, they always turned me into a villain. I’ve had to profess my innocence at least seventy-five times per day. *Maybe I should start my own protest.*

“Ugh, this is so boring. It’s just a normal tunnel. This is like asking a carpenter to make endless corridors. Actually, a carpenter making a never-ending corridor sounds more fun! I’d switch places with him in an instant. I could make a hallway that went straight to town! Hm?”

For some reason, my magic carved through iron faster than stone, so our progress was swift. Apparently, my magic had different effects on different materials.

“Ah, there’s a vein of iron over there. Can you mark the location on the wall

with some chalk? Although, it might be copper, I'm not sure what copper looks like. Just say that it's copper-esque, okay? Maybe it smells like copper, y'know? Oh, don't forget to say that it's only *sort of* similar to copper."

Ore all looked the same to me.

"Well, I'm certainly glad you can find lodes of ore so easily, but your descriptions of anything that's not iron leave something to be desired. 'Kind of silvery but don't blame me if it's not silver, okay?' is almost as obnoxious to write as 'I've got a hunch this is copper. Doesn't it have a whiff of copper? If it's not copper, it sure seems similar to copper, I guess.' You don't have to make excuses; no one will care if you make a mistake. I'm spending more time writing down your justifications than I am drawing the map! This map is indecipherable!"

The walls of the tunnel were covered in chalk scrawls. It kind of made us look unprofessional.

"Uhh?"

If I turned to the right, I could advance straight towards the mining village. As I delved, I searched through the earth with Jupiter Eye, navigated using Map, and found lodes of ore with Area Analyze. I used the same techniques when I did renovations.

I added supporting arches in the parts of the shaft near rich veins of ore so that miners would have more room to dig. The tunnel would slice through the centers of some lodes, making it especially easy to mine.

We'd need an ironworks. I had given Mr. Meridad some blueprints, so hopefully he was building one. In the meantime, I could process the ore with my alchemy. I wondered what the nerds were up to. It wouldn't surprise me if they had built a blast furnace trying to forge a sword. On the other hand, I'd be shocked if they actually did make a sword. The nerds were supernaturally uncoordinated. When they arrived in this world, they managed to set up a homebase with tents and a stakewall—they even built chairs—but they couldn't figure out how to make a table.

Anyway, I was almost done with the tunnel. As I neared my goal, I detected some sort of magical response from some of the deeper lodes.

“I get mining rights as my payment, right? Do you mind if I mine here? I get to keep fifty percent, yes? Are you listening to me?”

There was a massive iron lode below us, and underneath, something flowing with magical power, almost certainly mithril—my prize.

I had been searching for mithril this entire time. Although I wanted to upgrade the equipment of all my classmates with mithril, I didn’t have enough. The spot I was standing on was the most likely candidate for a vein of mithril. I probably wouldn’t gather enough mithril if I only kept ten percent of what I mined; I needed to stick to my guns and aim for a fifty percent share or I wouldn’t have enough for upgrades. I was willing to go no lower than thirty—no, twenty-five percent. I might be able to scrape by with only a twenty percent split, but that was my limit!

Merimeri said, “I am trying my best to answer you. In your proposal, you stated that you were willing to settle for fifty percent of any ore you mined, but Father informed me that you can keep 100% of your own labor, and that he does not wish to take any more from you, so it is all yours. Additionally, he declared that you have permission to mine whenever and wherever you please. The administrators of the region agreed to those terms, so there won’t be any issues.”

No negotiations needed!

“Are you nuts? Why did I spend so much time coming up with this excellent negotiating strategy if your father is going to be so generous? I swear, none of the officials in this region have any business acumen. Someone needs to beat some sense into them, and I’ve got just the stick for the job!”

I wanted to highball them with a fifty percent offer, but their plan was to let me keep everything I mined! What were they thinking? What if I decided to mine all the ore myself? They’d have nothing left! Those bureaucrats were going to get an earful from me. Iron was absolutely essential to the development of the region, and the duke’s naïveté would doom the frontier!

“Father’s aides warned me that you would angrily refuse his generosity. In that case, take as much as you need, and we will mine whatever you leave behind.”

At least Mr. Meridad had some competent people around him. Apparently, his most trusted attendant had served the family for generations, so he must have evolved some good sense through overcoming all the other hardships they had faced. The meatheads ought to be jealous—in contrast, they were devolving as they faced trials and tribulations.

“Sounds good to me.”

I only wanted the mithril anyway; I didn’t really need iron, nor did I have any use for copper and silver. The frontier, on the other hand, needed as much iron as they could get. Right below us, there was a massive lode of iron and a small vein of what was possibly mithril. This was a win-win scenario.

“Also, I’m about to introduce some new mining techniques that will completely revolutionize the craft. Tell the administrators not to flood the market and cause an economic crisis. Supply needs to increase slowly and steadily, okay?”

“What are you talking about, mining techniques? You’re simply smacking the wall and another section of tunnel pops out!”

I’d get the mithril I was looking for, and as much of it as I wanted. And with a free tunnel, the frontier would get a massive quantity of iron ore. *The duke would be better off leaving decision-making to his advisors*, I thought.

Well, there was no point comparing the sorts of people who excelled in times of peace with those who excelled in times of war. Perhaps both were necessary—advisors skilled in the arts of diplomacy and management, and a duke who could stand bravely against adversity.

Negotiations with the kingdom weren’t making much progress. Both sides were wasting time bickering about terms instead of agreeing to any compromises. The kingdom was getting impatient since they no longer had a source for spellstones. Meanwhile, we needed to make the frontier self-sufficient, so we could stand as equals at the negotiating table.

The only risk was assassination, but with Stalker Girl’s clan on our side, we could finally play the game of espionage. We had the advantage there. Our military lacked might, but I considered spy craft to be another dimension of warfare. We had folks like the meatheads to handle boots-on-the-ground stuff,

but nothing could substitute for a good spy.

Even if they sent assassins, our spies could easily discover and capture them, neutralizing the threat. If the assassin happened to be a beautiful woman, they could send her right over to my room! Fighting off beautiful women at the inn was basically all I did anymore, so I could handle it. I trained in the art every single day.

In fact, I was going to print out advertisements targeting beautiful assassins. Would five hundred copies be enough?

“Excuse me! Why won’t you listen to me? Why must you ignore me? If you don’t pay attention, I will weep until this tunnel flows with tears! You will get that waterslide you wanted!”

DAY 53

LATE MORNING

Using cute clothes as an economic stimulus is just fine, but please refrain from shaking the foundations.

THE TUNNEL

FINALLY, I CONFIRMED with the soldiers who accompanied Merimeri that work progressed smoothly.

I wished that they sent a civil administrator along with them. Though Merimeri understood the current plan, she didn't have a good grasp of the future direction of the project.

"If I remember correctly, you need at least one hundred crates of iron every year, yes? Six hundred forty kilos per box works out to...sixty-four thousand kilograms, or sixty-four metric tons per year. I have around six hundred crates, or six years' worth of iron, in my bag, and half the lode still remains. Should I mine that, too? Do you have somewhere to store it? I have about four hundred tons, which means the rest of the lode is probably the same amount? What do you think?"

I excavated about half of the lode, and stored it in my item bag. In order to clear the way to the potential mithril below, I had to take out half of it anyway. I could mine the remaining half, but it needed to be stored somewhere. It was likely too heavy to store in a warehouse. I could probably just hold onto it for them, too.

"Six years' worth...are you saying that you have enough iron to last us for six years? You need a place to store four hundred tons of iron, six hundred crates? What?!"

"Even if it's six years' worth, you'll find yourself wanting more. It's hard to imagine now, but the more iron you mine, the more uses you'll find for it, and the more demand there will be. Practically, this is only enough iron for three

years. Since the frontier is still developing, demand will increase over time, and increased production capacity will drive that demand. If an ironworks is built, it might not even last an entire year. That's the point of the development plan, after all."

Why did the soldiers look so troubled? Did they not have anywhere to store the iron? I thought that my explanation was fairly simple.

"If you need a warehouse, I can build it for you gratis. Hopefully it doesn't sink into the ground when we store all that iron, though."

I knew what I was talking about; I had experience in these matters. No matter how overprepared I was, I never prepared enough. I gathered my data from twenty randomly selected teenage girls. For example, when I made sixty pairs of stockings for twenty girls, I received one hundred extra orders. The same phenomenon was observed with knee socks and even fishnet tights. They were prismatic, so they were long-lasting and durable. It was almost impossible to wear them out, but the girls still demanded to have four pairs each. They would do the same if I released an entirely new design.

No matter how much of a margin I leave, I always ended up with more work orders. Today was a day off from dungeon raiding, but not from my side hustle!

"This is a priority message! Relay that we somehow might need even more iron!"

"At once!" said the soldier before sprinting off.

Perhaps they could have made use of a waterslide after all. Since they didn't have anywhere to store the iron, I decided to leave the rest of the lode untouched. I kept thirty tons for myself, and if it wasn't enough, I could just return later. The lodes nearer to town were entirely untouched, so I could easily grab hundreds of tons in a single day if need be. In the meantime, I extracted the ore that I suspected to be mithril by using Holding to grasp the lode and Gravity to haul it out of the earth. There was no way I would try something as risky as Teleport. Then, I used Alchemy to remove the impurities from the ore.

There it is! It looked like mithril to me. The color was similar, though a bit muddled. Appraisal said it was just "Metal," so it likely had some impurities remaining.

Still, this was a big find. The way magic seeped into the metal was unique, and it could handle any amount of MP I poured in. The more magic I added, the more radiant it became—this moon-white metal was definitely mithril.

“It’s mining time!”

There was no such thing as too much mithril. Even after I upgraded all of our equipment, I would still discover more uses for it. Forging items with refined mithril from the start would surely produce higher-quality items. At the moment, I wasn’t skilled enough to do that, and I suspected that the skills attached to better gear would use up too much MP at this point.

For a group as large as ours, I needed a staggering amount of mithril to create and upgrade equipment to the point where it couldn’t be improved any more. I doubted that we would ever see the day where all thirty of us were kitted out with full sets of perfect equipment. Even if I mined all the mithril here, it probably wouldn’t be enough. *There’s no end to the hustle!*

“Okay, I’m done. You’re all depleted. Kind of hungry now, so I’m going to go, maybe?”

“Are you talking to the vein of ore? When did you become such boon companions? It is indeed almost time for lunch, but why did you mine multiple years’ worth of iron before midday?”

If the iron really was my friend, I wouldn’t have the Loner title. *Now I’m about to cry!*

Still, I felt a closeness to Mr. Lode here, as it was buried deep underground and had possibly met my long-lost Miss Sex Appeal! A friend of my charisma was a friend of mine...though I had yet to encounter my sex appeal. I couldn’t quite call something I’d never met a friend, right? Our friendship was impossible, especially now that the lode was depleted. Besides, a teenage boy whose only friend was a bunch of minerals underground was simply depressing.

Merimeri continued, “You still refuse to listen to me. Why are you talking to the ground? Why did you laugh just now, and why did it sound so pathetic?”

Next, I needed to connect the mineshaft to the mining village. I had already found the shaft they started with Area Analyze, so all I had to do was connect

them, and I would be finished. *Next stop, jambalaya!*

The protests and lectures had interrupted my peaceful breakfast. It was impossible to enjoy my meal under those circumstances. The knee sock protest almost turned into a riot, and a teenage boy was at serious risk of being on the wrong side of history at that sort of protest. If they had protested fishnet tights, I would've ended up with way more additional orders!

"All right, almost there."

I slowed down my rate of renovation—I mean, tunneling. Not knowing how sturdy the tunnel on the other side was, I didn't want to shake its foundations unnecessarily. Indeed, Merimeri kept stamping her feet and that caused the ground to shake quite a bit, though my tunnel was structurally sound, so really we were quite safe. Her miniskirt and knee socks also caused some tremulous activity...her bodyguards didn't know where to look.



“All connected, probably? I’ll go ahead and reinforce the structure, so I don’t have to redo my work. My days off are so endangered that I need to do what I can to protect them. Seriously!”

“I am once again asking that you speak to me, and not to the mineshaft. Are you prepared for my wailing and gnashing of teeth? Are you prepared for the river of tears that will give you the waterslide you’ve always dreamed of?”

Now she wanted the waterslide? All this time, she did nothing but criticize the idea. It would likely upset the miners, too. How could a waterslide in a mineshaft not be a problem?

Now that the tunnels were joined, once I reinforced the last stretch of tunnel and exited at the mining village, my work would be done. I was paid with mining rights instead of money, and mithril was far more valuable anyway. Not that I wanted to sell it, of course; it was far too useful to sell.

While Merimeri went over to the village chief, I checked out the local village shop.

“Hey, old man, you got any local specialties? Any surpluses? What, you only sell iron? Is that what you eat? It’s bad for your teeth, y’know? Chomping down on an ingot will mess them up but good.”

“What kind of damned fool would eat iron?!” the proprietor said. “You need some sense stuffed into your melon, boy! D’you see anything but rocks in this here locality? Only goods we have too many of are ores. Care to take a gander, boy?”

Nothing to eat. The mountains were quite far from the forest and the river, so these people didn’t have much in the way of arable land. *More importantly, this has been bugging me ever since I’ve gotten to this world, but I’ll say it again. Yet another middle-aged man!*

The encounter rate for old guys here was way too damn high. Almost everyone I met was some old man. Why couldn’t there be more typical secondary world fantasy tropes, like encounters with beautiful women?

“Normally in this situation, the shop assistant would be a girl-next-door cutie, and the village chief would be an elegant woman, and I would probably get a

random encounter with some hot villager, too! Instead, it's all a bunch of middle-aged losers! This town is full of them! Is that what the village specializes in? No one needs that!"

"We ain't sellin' old men here," he said. "Don't care if you don't need 'em because I don't got 'em!"

Merimeri returned and we gave the village chief a tour of the tunnel as we headed back to town. Why did they need a tour? It was just a hole in the ground. The tunnel, the snowcapped mountains it cut through, the gorgeous scenery, the complete lack of specialty goods, the profusion of old men—I didn't need any of this stuff!

I did discover something worthwhile in that village. The item in question was sold as a decorative rock, and I bought out their entire stock.

These rocks contained large quantities of mithril and other rare metals. None of the furnaces in the village could smelt them, so they just regarded them as strange decorations instead of the valuable materials they actually were. Since the furnaces couldn't melt them, the ore must have had an extremely high melting point. Therefore, I expected the base metal to be particularly resilient.

I arranged a contract to purchase their mystery metals, so I would receive more in the future. I paid in wheat, vegetable oil, buckets, crates, and whatever cash I had. So, I had some exotic metals but was completely broke.

I'd have to ask the Class Rep for my allowance when I returned to town. At the moment, I couldn't afford to buy food or pay for the inn.

"He dug this mineshaft in a single day?!"

"In point of fact, we had only asked him this morning, and he finished before midday. The entire time, he disregarded everything I had to say."

"Impossible!"

I had collected my cut of the profits from the general store and the guild just this morning, and it was already gone. I spent some money on my open contracts for wholesale orders of rice, soy sauce, cloth and thread, and various

other odds and ends I'd ordered on a whim. Now I'd bought up the rare metals. These were just essentials.

I'm kind of concerned that my daily necessities were getting so expensive. If the Class Rep didn't confiscate most of my money before I spent it, I would never be able to afford rent. She didn't realize that I'd been bribing the Poster Girl with sweets to overlook my bills.

The girls would give me a payment for their debt every morning, but the Class Rep confiscated that money right after. Then, Miss Armor Rep, Slimey, and I lined up to receive our daily allowance. That allowance, plus the dividends I received from the general store and the armory, made me rich every morning. And every night, I was destined for the poorhouse.

No one seemed to acknowledge this, but I was technically Miss Armor Rep and Slimey's boss, and it would look suspect if I took their money. I wanted an additional order of pocket money!

Unfortunately, if I asked for this, they would counter with a demand that I make more things for them, then they would vote on the matter, and I'd always lose. Every time I got a bigger allowance, I ended up having to do more work, and the girls were buried in more debt, and any payments they made on it were immediately confiscated! So, I every time I asked for money, I was pulled deeper into an endless cycle of poverty!

"This tunnel is all brand new?!" asked a villager.

"Yes, as you can see, but he ignored me the entire time. I informed him that we didn't have enough miners for a shaft this deep, but he paid me no heed!"

Recently, the girls harangued me for going broke after paying wholesale on a ton of eggs. But without eggs, my meals would be worse, and the eggs in this world were spectacular!

Maintaining modern living standards in a medieval economy was costly. I needed to make enough investments to create surpluses of food and supplies.

Though the frontier was gaining more wealth from trading spellstones and mushrooms with merchants from the kingdom, the circulation of money couldn't keep up with the speed of economic development. That being said, if

the frontier issued its own currency, that would introduce an exchange rate, which would make trade even more difficult. That could wait for when the frontier declared independence from the kingdom.

“My only option? I’ve gotta take all the kingdom’s money.”

“Why is he talking to himself as he expands the mineshaft?”

“He just does that. There is simply nothing we can do about it. Believe me, I’ve tried everything, and he ignored it all.”

“What?”

According to Merimeri, the frontier was now more economically developed than the capital, which meant that my little cottage industry was more productive than all the industry in the capital. I could make a killing selling all of my manufactured goods in the capital, and once I got all of their money, I’d put an end the cash shortage facing the frontier. Although if the kingdom issued more currency and caused massive inflation, that would doom the whole economy. *You can’t expect a teenager to determine an entire nation’s monetary policy—it’s absurd!*

Maybe what’s-his-face could’ve done it if he was still alive. If we had somehow become friends, all of these problems with weapon development, manufacturing, and economics junk would’ve gotten solved.

But...he chose to kill his classmates instead. Then I killed him.

It seemed like thirty high school students couldn’t solve a shortage of currency on their own. The five meatheads and four nerds were counted in that number, after all.

“We’re almost through the tunnel, so do you mind if I split? Mr. Meridad spends way too much time apologizing, bowing, and rambling, and I’d rather not have to deal with someone with such a guilty conscience, y’know? Can I just drop the iron off at a warehouse and bounce?”

“That would be extremely helpful, as we lack the means to transport nine hundred tons of iron ore with ease. Don’t you worry about meeting with Father, although he isn’t expressing guilt. You’re confused; those are not apologies but in fact shows of gratitude. He is trying to give you his thanks, don’t you see?”

Now that I finished my job, I went back to town. *Still no money, though.* I would negotiate for some with the Class Rep.

“Hello? Did you hear anything I said?”

DAY ?



KINGDOM OF DIORELLE

INTERLUDE: THE ROYAL CASTLE

THE ROYAL GUARD departed from the castle, heading out of the capital. The impossible order to suppress the rebellion in the Duchy of Omui had arrived.

“At the very least, I would like to receive a decree from His Royal Majesty.”

This was the first time that the Royal Guard had left the castle, much less the capital. They followed orders that weren’t backed by a royal decree...alas, no other division could handle this matter. It was paramount that we meet with Duke Omui.

“We are in the midst of a crisis. Broker a peace treaty with the frontier at once!”

“The 1st Brigade is stranded. This task is suited for the Royal Guard, the elites. So commands His Royal Majesty!”

The 1st Brigade couldn’t move after their defeat on the frontier. The 2nd Brigade moved in to secure their rescue. That was not in itself enough to cause our present crisis. However, suspicions had grown over the movements of the 3rd Brigade—the Royal Guard that answered only to His Majesty. Even the Church was somehow involved.

“If it truly is a royal decree, I will obey without question,” I said. “Please grant me an audience with His Royal Majesty.”

“Our kingdom is falling apart. Raising a fuss would only cause greater panic!”

“It is for that reason that I must see the king. Please, I beg of you.”

Nothing made sense anymore. The situation was now dire. Why was I kept in

the dark? Why were they getting in my way?

“If you do not obey the emergency edict, we will have no choice but to disband and reorganize the Royal Guard.”

“The Royal Guard must maintain its strategic independence—”

“We shall fervently guarantee that you will. But you must take the front as soon as you can. His Royal Majesty is counting on you.”

“Understood,” I said.

Just like that, I was cut off from the castle, and from the royal capital, with no understanding of present circumstances. If the spellstone embargo continued, the kingdom would dissolve. We had incurred far too many debts to the other nations. If tensions with the Church escalated any further, we would have no allies to call upon.

These could be the last days of our kingdom. The crisis would not end, even if the current king were deposed. Invasions were brutal, yet we had no other recourse. Our diplomats had already gone to the frontier. No one knew what caused this. Indeed, the nobility’s misunderstanding of the frontier would be our downfall.

“What shall we do, my lady?”

“First, contact the Adventurers’ Guild. If our sources are correct, there is only one way into the frontier from Nallogi: a dungeon.”

This would not be a war. There would be no invasion. If we had to conquer a dungeon to discover the truth, we would need the help of the Adventurers’ Guild.

“B-but, the frontier...”

“You need not continue. I understand your concerns as well as anyone.”

“I apologize, my lady.”

The kingdom and the frontier—despite our differences, we should have been united by a shared will...but the kingdom had betrayed the frontier a dozen times over.

If war broke out, it would cost us more than some spilled blood. Far more.

DAY 53

LUNCH

I'll have to give the nerds some credit if they actually made a steam engine by whacking some metal rods together.

OMUI CITY

I WITNESSED A TERRIFYING SCENE—so shocking I was rendered speechless. *Please, make it go away*, I thought. The nerds spoke in turn: “Oh, it’s Haruka-kun!”

“Good timing. We can’t get it out of the armory.”

“Yeah, it’s too big.”

“And heavy.”

“Do you mind putting it in your item bag? Just drop it off at the river.”

It really was too big and too heavy. It was larger than the entrance to the forge.

“How did you end up building a steamboat when you tried to make a sword?! Making chairs when you meant to make a table is one thing, but why would a sword need a steam engine?! No amount of screwups while making a sword could possibly result in a steamboat! It’s impossible. It’s absurd that you somehow did this by hitting a heated iron billet with a hammer! You must’ve done this on purpose. I just don’t understand why you even bothered. We can power everything with magic! We don’t need steam!”

The steamboat took up all the space in the workshop. It was too big to fit through the doors. *Let’s just leave it there!*

The old man said, “Oh, no you don’t! This contraption is in the way. Duke Omui commissioned me for some work, and I can’t do it with your iron dinghy taking up space! You have to get it out of here.”

It was a mid-sized wooden paddle steamer with iron cladding and reinforcement. They somehow put together a boat without knowing how to build a table. Maybe they had planned on making another chair and it ended up like this. I was sure that the steam engine was also made of iron, for if it were made of wood, I would be impressed!

“Why didn’t you stop the nerds, old man?” I asked. “Were you helping them? I bet you were.”

The ironclad was too well put together for him not to have helped—I mean, look at those finishes! The curved hull would’ve leaked like a sieve if he wasn’t there to help. The old man was looking away, pretending he didn’t hear me, but his guilt was obvious!

After bringing the boat to the river and waiting for the nerds to board, I obviously bombarded them with a meteor shower. Though I had been conserving my MP all day, I burned through all of it in one go with that spell. The damn boat didn’t sink! They added a Barrier enchantment to the boat!

The Sorcerer had tried making protective enchantments and barriers before, but it made equipment too heavy for any practical use...so he put it on the damn boat! They had known I would lob meteors at their boat all along! Should I disintegrate their atoms instead?

When I flew into the air to rain down my meteors, I spotted the meatheads playing tag with a bunch of kobolds in the forest. *I’ll just pretend that I didn’t see that.* Those idiots were more suited to a life in the monster forest than to civilization. I bet their jobs had changed to Barbarian by this point.

“But that just might work?”

I had contemplated making sort of cargo ship to ship timber and iron, but these nerds made an ironclad battleship for some inexplicable reason. What really pissed me off was that they went out of their way to protect it from burning. Even so, I had to admit that installing a barrier device that was too large for personal use onto a boat was actually a great idea. But I hated how it protected them from my attacks!

“Ah, I feel so mentally drained! Isn’t a day off supposed to make you feel more relaxed?”

Miss Armor Rep and the others were probably at the general store. I had a feeling that they were eyeing up my new line of bags despite the fact that they were all bankrupt. What was the point of delivering my products to the general store if they just brought them straight back to the inn? *I’m wasting so much effort here!*

“Ohh emm geeeee!”

Yup, they were total shopping addicts.

Maybe they were nostalgic for anything that reminded them of life back in the real world—so nostalgic that they chased after any reminder; they even went to war over purses!

“That’s mine!”

“Never!”

“You can take it over my cold, dead body!”

“Yahhh!”

What else was there to do? They tried to extract as much joy as they could from cute clothes and tasty food. We’d lived in this world for nearly two months. Those days back in Japan were long gone. *But they adjusted to their new lives here in the worst possible way!*

When they could only focus on surviving another day, they didn’t have the time to think of the past. They wore false smiles as their nerves frayed. Now, they were safe, and they could afford to remember Japan and everything they had lost.

The guys had it easy, in comparison. The nerds had lived their lives waiting for the chance to live in a fantasy world. This world was like a dream for them. On Earth, they were hopeless. But in this world, they finally took life seriously.

The meatheads had even less trouble adjusting. They were perfectly suited to the fantasy world, especially to living in the woods.

Back in Japan, they were all elite athletes. If they weren't brought to this world, they would've likely gone pro, gaining riches and fame. Yet I knew they didn't want to return. The meatheads had found a place where they belonged, where they could enjoy death-defying thrills on the battlefield, rely on instincts alone, and live every moment to the fullest. They were like a barbarian culture that had been dying from boredom in our world, only to finally find a purpose here. Although, they were likely too stupid to feel boredom, and they were always earnest and excited. *Y'know, like morons.*

I didn't have anything to go back to. The only thing I missed was the bookstore. Losing access to bookstores was a bitter pill to swallow.

But Miss Armor Rep made up for it. Since I was the one who brought her out of the darkness, I wanted to make sure her life was a good one. In Japan, I had no attachments, no one I cared about, nothing I wanted to care for, nothing that I couldn't live without.

I preferred this world. Now I had Slimey, too. I made real connections to the people of this world.

The girls were different. Nothing about this world was pleasant for them. They had to give up so much when they were brought here.

"Atatatata!"

"Take that and that!"

"Eeyah!"

Or so I had assumed.

No wonder that they became spoiled, entitled shopaholics. I did what I could to make them smile, but that didn't lessen how amazed I was that they retained their sanity.

No one could have blamed the girls if any of them went mad, lashed out violently, or suffered a nervous breakdown. Somehow, no one lost it like what's-his-face did. Because of that, thirty of us were still alive. Going crazy would've been the easy route, but they held out. Their mental fortitude had to have come from the mystical power of friendship—and of shopping!

“C’mon, let’s negotiate!”

“All right, but only if you take your hands off it!”

“No, I called dibs!”

“I’ll trade for it!”

“Well, I haven’t bought it yet, so...”

I had another night of crafting ahead of me. Everything that mattered to them in sixteen years of life on earth—all the familiar foods and charming fashion—couldn’t be forgotten in an instant, but I could try to ease the pain. They would have suffered less if they had given in to despair and died in the forest, but I didn’t want that to happen. The least I could do was to help them laugh. Their smiles made the long hours of freelance worth it...*Actually, is it really worth it?*

“Eee! I saw that bag in a shop once! I always wanted one!”

I wanted to apologize to the original designers of my very authentic Duchy & Banana handbags. Honestly, I kind of wanted one myself, but I couldn’t replace my item bag. Furthermore, any fancy accessories I made clashed terribly with my black cloak! I would look like an absolute dingus with a different bag.

“Hmm, this is a little too big,” the diminutive Vice Rep C complained.

“Yeah, none of the sizes work for you.”

“Call the manufacturer over!”

“I demand an apology and a discount!”

“No, let’s not complain one by one. We’ll just tell him as a group when he gets here.”

“Ah, welcome back!”

Those bags aren’t too big, you’re just too small! I thought. Most of the complaints came from the Tiny Animal, after all. *Go back to the kids’ section!*

“Should I get something sporty, or a cute clutch I can bring to a party?”

“But you’ve never been invited to a party before.”

Vice Rep B knowingly tapped her temple, “Ah, but we formed a party, haven’t

we?”

I'd neither gone to a party, nor formed one. Who could I party with, goblins?
No thanks! Maybe the meatheads would like that!

“Boo, I want everything!”

“Yeah, looks like we're gonna have to go farm some monsters.”

“Yeah!”

Everyone was having fun, or at least having a lot of transactions. My classmates took so few days off because they couldn't hold on to their savings. They wanted clothes so badly that they were perfectly happy to exhaust themselves hunting monsters. Were they adjusting to this world, too? They were actually well adapted, weren't they? Could it be that they weren't using shopping to cover up for mental trauma? Were they just greedy all along? Upon further consideration, they seemed to be extremely unbalanced when it came to shopping!

“No way, look! Another new item?!”

“I need it! I'll buy it!”

There's no way this is healthy.

DAY 53

MIDDAY

Picnics are a new trend in town, but I suspect living in caves won't become the next trend.

OMUI CITY

MISS ARMOR REP was having a good time shopping at the general store with the other girls. With some timidity, she shuffled between several handkerchiefs, unable to decide. Was she going to use it to clean her armor?

“Hey, Miss Armor Rep, I’m back and I’m famished, so let’s jambalaya. There’s no shrimp, so I’ll use mystery bird meat instead. If I add eggs, it’ll basically taste just like omurice. Even I can’t tell the difference and I’m making it! It’s pretty much just chicken with rice, y’know?”

As long as I insisted that it was jambalaya, no one would catch on.

“Welcome back!”

Miss Armor Rep and I stopped by the inn to fetch Slimey, Poster Girl, and Stalker Girl. We were going to have an afternoon picnic and I knew the perfect spot. Waiting for the rest of the girls would take a while, so I considered making some improvements to the pseudo-dungeon over there. Alternatively, I could take Slimey to my cave for the first time. The cave was pretty far, so I really couldn’t do both in one day.

If I went all out with Teleport, hitting both was a possibility, but I didn’t want to run around like an idiot on my day off. There were already too many idiots chasing kobolds around in the woods. *Better to just ignore them.*

Poster Girl said, “Thanks for the food!”

Jiggle jiggle!

It was sunny out and the view was great. It really felt like a picnic—a jambalaya picnic.

“It’s nice to eat in the great outdoors.”

“Somehow, food always tastes better this way!”

Wiggle!

Stalker Girl took a bite and said, “Wow, this is birdie-licious!”

“You haven’t made this ‘omurice’ in a while!”

Jiggle jiggle!

According to the Poster Girl, since the area surrounding the town was now safe, picnicking was the hottest new trend. *Time to develop a line of picnic goods*, I thought. *I can taste the profits already!*

Until recently, the forest abutted the town walls, so going on a picnic wasn’t safe. Now that the forest was cleared and the townsfolk wandered around with warlike clubs hanging from their belts, the goblins were the ones who had to worry about safety!

Girls who weren’t my classmates would normally be in danger if they went on a picnic, but Slimey was guaranteed to keep them safe. With Slimey here, even an orc king couldn’t interrupt their picnic. If a situation was too dangerous for Slimey, not even the mightiest fortress could keep us safe.

A monster that could pose a threat to Slimey would have had to come from the deepest dungeons. Those levels were typically so dangerous that I wouldn’t even bother trying to remodel them. I had given up on my plans to build a public bath in the Ultimate Dungeon, after all. It could never work, since the water would make you cold by the time you climbed a hundred stories up.

Additionally, the death scythes were patrolling nearby—they’d gained a ton of levels from clearcutting so much of the forest—and Stalker Girl had a high level of Presence Sensing, even if she wasn’t useful in battle. Poster Girl kind of made up for it, as she was surprisingly powerful for a commoner.

The scythes were probably enjoying themselves as they hunted down goblin hordes. If they kept playing with goblins and kobolds, there was a risk that they would turn into meatheads! And the nerds escaped in their ship? My surprise attack thwarted!

“Nothing like a picnic on a day off!”

“No kiddi—wait a minute, why are we having a picnic right next to the pseudo-dungeon?!”

“Shhhh! Just pretend it’s not there!”

I had wanted to try making some monsters using the Treasure of the Monster Core, but I’d never finished analyzing it. Strangely enough, the avatar of greed wasn’t interested in the gem, but the avatar of gluttony was, so in the end I gave it to my slime companion. I hoped it tasted good.

The rest of the girls wouldn’t get here until around three o’clock, so I left some sweets and snacks for them. Stalker Girl and the Poster Girl stared ravenously at the snacks; I didn’t think they could last until the others arrived. The other girls needed to hurry up.

“Shall we?”

Miss Armor Rep nodded and Slimey wiggled, indicating that they would accompany me. I told them that they could do whatever they wanted on their day off, but they wanted to stay with me.

“Lately you’ve started acting a lot like Slimey, Miss Armor Rep! You really need to practice speaking more!”

“Okay.”

Jiggle jiggle!

The only time she felt like talking was when she scolded me every morning. Her vocabulary grew richer by the day, probably from learning all the wrong words from the girls with their impassioned rants. She had supposedly gotten much better at speaking during those girls-only meetings. Whenever I asked them what they talked about in them, they said that the meetings were only for girls, as were the contents.

I added some improvements to the pseudo-dungeon, then discreetly split off for a moment and snuck into the town on the other side. Jumping over the wall would’ve worked just fine, but I happened to run into a member of Stalker Girl’s clan, and they smuggled me in.

Once inside, I stopped by the Adventurers' Guild, only to learn that since every attempt to overcome the pseudo-dungeon ended in humiliating defeat, no one was even trying anymore.

"Pfft, I went out of my way to produce fiendish new traps, and these good-for-nothing adventurers show no appreciation!"

Nod nod.

Wiggle wiggle.

Given that most of these adventurers lost their equipment in my pseudo-dungeon, it had simply become too costly to attempt it. There was even a rumor that any couples who entered the dungeon together would soon break up. What were those couples getting up to when their clothes melted?

"Don't go on dates in dungeons! What are you thinking? Of course, you'll get dumped if you bring a girl to a dungeon! The dungeon isn't the problem here!"

Jiggle jiggle.

The current record-holder managed to jump across two of the rock platforms that hung above the corrosive lake, but slipped and fell on the third because it was covered in oil.

"Seems like folks in this world don't understand the genre conventions here. If you have to jump across three platforms, the third one will *always* have a trap, y'know? Why do they fall for every trick in the book?"

Slimey wiggled with uncertainty.

The same thing had happened with the men-at-arms—they gave up after losing almost all of their weapons and armor. Could a man-at-arms who's been disarmed still be called a man-at-arms? With nothing left to them but the clothes on their backs and wooden sticks, they were dressed just like me! That sucks, I don't want to be mistaken for one of these middle-aged losers.

"This place is kind of empty, isn't it?"

Since most of the population had fled to the frontier, this town was practically deserted. Wherever I looked, I saw desolate streets lined with abandoned buildings.

Since the Stalker Girl's clan continued to help locals immigrate to the frontier, there was no slowing down the population decline.

"I'm not surprised that folks wanna ditch this dead-end town; it's run by an orc lord and there are plenty of jobs available on the frontier."

Nod nod!

Wiggle wiggle!

Most of the stores were closed, so there weren't many goods available. I bought up anything noteworthy—somehow, despite having just received my allowance, I was flat broke again.

The girls were sure to give me a tough time when I got back, but that was a problem for future me. It wasn't my fault that I could never hold on to my rent money! *I swear!*

Slimey, bored, shrank down and darted under my cloak and started rustling around. I was quite surprised when a swollen, Slimey-shaped lump appeared on my tunic. Even Miss Armor Rep was startled!

"I spent so much time making those glue traps but they won't see any use," I sighed.

It was a marvelous idea: an adventurer would spot an obvious pit trap, but if they tried to pass it by sidling along the walls, they would find themselves in quite the sticky situation. No one was up for the challenge.

I also set up a trap where I painted a monster on a trick wall. If someone tried to hit the monster, the wall would just topple over onto the attacker. It was a nasty trap, but it lacked the impact of the glue trap.

Wiggle wiggle.

Slimey seemed dissatisfied with something. I pondered the possible reasons, and then it hit me. Of course, we needed a tentacle monster in this dungeon! At the moment, I was the only one who had tentacles. And if I tried to capture any female adventurers who'd had their clothes dissolved, it would've caused a scandal. *Also, I'm not a monster, got it?*

"Okay, let's put a real pitfall in front of the optical illusion of a pitfall. That

should be pretty popular with the adventurers, right?”

I had made sure to inspect how the pseudo-dungeon was doing when we walked through. It didn't need any maintenance, and all the new traps were functioning properly. The Command Golems were doing their jobs well, so I rewarded them with some extra MP.

It looked like there was a group of emissaries from the kingdom visiting a nearby town, but I didn't see any need to check them out. That is, unless they happened to be led by a female knight. The moment I had that thought, Miss Armor Rep stared razor-sharp daggers at my back. Her glares were more deadly than ever!

“I guess I shouldn't need more women warriors in my life?”

Jiggle jiggle.

I couldn't discount the value of killer women. I was already surrounded by women who said they were going to kill me, but they were still valuable.

“I mean, don't kill me over shopping orders, am I right? Why are teenage girls as vicious as Nobunaga? Wouldn't they rather be like Ieyasu and show some patience? Also, can you stop using Hideyoshi-style tactics against me? I'm gonna start crying because of you!”

Miss Armor Rep was dragging me in the opposite direction by my hair. *All right, I get the hint!*

“Who wouldn't be curious after hearing about a female knight? I've only met crabby old men wherever I went. Not even a single event flag for girls? If I've triggered *more* old dudes coming my way, I swear, I'll burn them! And I'll cry!”

Boing boing.

Miss Armor Rep was patting me on the back. This world was truly overflowing with tears. All this crying was making my eyes hurt, so it was definitely time to leave.

“Well, it's about time, but let's just take the long way back. If we stop by a village, they might have some novel ingredients. I don't have money, but I can

always barter, as I've got plenty of wheat and mushrooms... Why don't we just make mushrooms the new currency? Then I'll literally never run out!"

I got some nods and wiggles, so we agreed to take the long way. Still, I felt pretty awkward, always talking to myself. I wished that Miss Armor Rep would at least grace me with a verbal answer. She wasn't even wearing her helmet this time! I think Slimey was having too much of an influence on her. *You're supposed to be the senior, Miss Armor Rep! You're literally Slimey's ex-boss!*

Also, Slimey's high-speed movement was getting faster. His level hadn't gone up or anything. Was this some sort of growth spurt? *Don't tell me he's going to have a bigger appetite now!*

There was no escape from my side gigs. Miss Insatiable Greed had spent all of her allowance as well. It would've definitely been cheaper for me to just make her a handkerchief than for her to buy it at the store, but I wasn't going to point that out. I knew that the girls simply wanted to enjoy the retail therapy. Besides, I had to earn my cut... *One day off is way too short!*

DAY 53

MIDDAY

Halloween doesn't belong in a fantasy world.

INTERLUDE: PICNIC

EVERYONE WAS ENERGETIC when Haruka-kun was around, but without him, the girls seemed a little lonely.

We were all getting along well and had grown closer as friends, but we were all approaching our limits. Haruka-kun was the only person who spoiled us. He persevered all by himself, fought all his battles alone, and always rescued us when we needed it. His strength, his sweetness—we yearned for it.

It was the same sort of loneliness that a child experiences when their parent who shelters and spoils them goes away. We were now separated from our families, so we transferred those feelings to Haruka-kun. He protected us and pampered us without expecting anything in return. Alone.

“He went to work, even on his day off?”

“Didn’t he say the mining was finished?”

“He gave us all those stockings, too. That means he was probably doing his side job earlier.”

“I think he said he was going to mine more mithril since he used it all upgrading our equipment.”

“That’s splendid, I want my robe to get a mithril upgrade! I should ask him to make some adjustments in the meantime; it’s a little too constricting in the chest area,” Vice Rep B said.

“Oh, *wow*. Your life *really* sounds nightmarish,” Vice Rep A said, rolling her eyes.

Haruka-kun had gone to install new traps in the pseudo-dungeon. It was

supposed to be a day off for him too, but he worked through it anyway. Even when we tried to do something nice for him, he ended up taking care of us instead. He never slept anymore; maybe he never would again.

He blamed it on his Titles, and while there was some truth to that, he had stopped sleeping a long time ago.

I knew that tonight he'd grumble about how busy and tired he was the entire night while he worked. Whenever we were in low spirits, he would always show up, flash a smile, and say something like, "New merch available! Come to me, my precious money," and brighten our day.

When did he stop sleeping? I wondered. Perhaps after he killed Tanaka-kun, or possibly when those two villages were destroyed.

He always smiled when he saw that we were happy. He looked like he had so much fun fooling around with Kakizaki-kun, Oda-kun, and their friends. Slimey and Angelica could always be found by his side. Hopefully, time would heal him.

But the more that time passed, the more he wanted to protect. Now he was trying to protect the whole duchy. Haruka-kun had spent his childhood losing family members one after another. Now, he couldn't endure anyone else having to die.

That was why he felt so wounded when someone was unhappy, why he never tried to make friends.

He seemed happy enough to be surrounded by us. But it meant that he worked even harder to make us smile.

Haruka had killed someone because he couldn't bear to see anyone else die. He'd probably regressed to using his old coping mechanisms from back when his family passed away. He kept torturing himself while pretending that he didn't feel anything, doing everything he could to save others.

It was good that Haruka-kun had found something he wanted to protect, but there was nothing he wouldn't do to protect the things he cared about. He wouldn't hesitate a moment to throw his life away.

Even if time was something that could heal his emotional wounds, we didn't have enough of it. There were too many dangers in this world.

Haruka-kun spoiled us like we were his family. He projected his lost relatives onto us and desperately tried to protect us. The only solution was for us to become strong enough to be able to protect him, but there was never enough time. Too much had happened in the last two months.

Once he returned, I knew how it would go. He'd serve us dinner, pretending like it was a pain, and cheer us up.

To ensure that we didn't thank him, he'd make himself look like a villain, gloating about how much he ripped us off.

He did everything he could to prevent us from thanking him. He hated to receive gratitude, so much so that he forbade himself from accepting it. He still couldn't forgive himself for his own helplessness.

Perhaps that was how he survived. He clawed his way to victory, overcoming his terrible stats and skills, and did whatever it took to avoid feeling helpless.

If Haruka-kun lost his life...we would fall apart. I would break.

"When he gets back, we must pass a resolution for more candy!"

"I wonder what's for dinner?"

"What's his next product going to be? Let's have Angelica-san find out for us!"

"Why is he fine with making stockings but not underwear?"

We had to be able to protect him. That's why we needed to be stronger. We had to show him that we could. He had saved our lives, over and over, despite being the weakest person from our class. *That's why...that's why...*

"Unfortunately, he's prioritizing our equipment for the time being," I said. "He needs to focus on mithril upgrades, got it?"

"Awww!"

"So lame! Let's revolt!"

Slowly but surely, everyone was adjusting to the new normal. We hadn't given up. We were beginning to find our resolve. Little by little—because Haruka-kun worked so hard on our behalf. Soon, we would be able to survive on our own in this world, able to protect Haruka-kun.

“Where is he?”

“Well, he did go all the way to Nallogi. He is fast, though.”

I didn't like how spoiled rotten we had become, however. Some of the girls' personalities had changed. They used to be so cool and reserved, but now they were bratty. Cute clothes and tasty sweets were simply too tantalizing; they could melt even the iciest heart.

“I'm back, maybe? Let's eat! I bought some pumpkins on my way back, so it's a pumpkin harvest festival! A Halloween party! Trick or Trident!”

“Welcome back!” we said in unison.

“What do you plan to do with your pumpkins?”

Why was our only choice between getting tricked and getting stabbed with a trident? Wait, why was he holding a trident?! That would just be combat, wouldn't it? And plying girls with sweets while asking if you can trick them should get him reported to the authorities!

Nothing he said made any sense, as usual. Especially not his jokes, if they could even be called that. First of all, who says “maybe” after “I'm back?” Why is he more confused about whether he's back than about holding a trident? He should've ended his last sentence with a question mark, not an exclamation point!

Well, he was definitely back. Haruka-kun ran around in a panic as the girls teased him, causing a scene. He was the same as always.

After our picnic, we walked back to the inn together, frolicking and chattering and bouncing.

The pumpkin festival began. He confessed that he bartered some mushrooms to acquire the pumpkins, which was really just his way of admitting that he was flat broke. He was supposed to pay rent with the money I gave him! *I'm gonna lecture him later!*

“Pumpkin pie!”

“Whoa!”

“A pumpkin festival!”

“Simmered pumpkin, it’s simmered pumpkin!”

“He even made pumpkin soup! It’s pumpkin everything!”

Every face lit up with a smile.



We had a wonderful time shopping together, but at one point Vice Rep C hummed a particular song to herself as she perused racks of clothing. It was a melancholic song about missing loved ones from far away. We recognized the tune almost immediately—a reminder of our old lives. We tried to maintain smiles, even as some wept soundlessly.

Angelica probably told him about it, and he decided to put on a pumpkin festival to cheer us up. Pumpkins were Vice Rep C's favorite food, after all. Haruka-kun pretended the timing was purely coincidental.

He called out, "Five hundred yen a slice. I need that cash money!"

Angelica had to have told him something, and he sought out a village that sold pumpkins. He probably wouldn't accept any thanks. He'd insist on masquerading as a conniving profiteer, but I saw right through his ruse. He was always the culprit responsible.

"That's right, fresh simmered pumpkin! It's not a close friend of pumpkin pie, but I've got that too. I baked the pies myself, so I'm not a villain. I don't know anything about their complex pumpkin dish rivalry. I'm just an innocent chef! I deny all accusations, okay?"

We couldn't resolve the relationship issues between the simmered pumpkin and the pumpkin pie, but everything tasted delicious on its own. The pumpkin chips were a huge hit, and we slurped down all the pumpkin soup and pumpkin cake, too. Haruka-kun complained that without cheese, cream, mirin, and vinegar, he couldn't make anything properly. Regardless, everything tasted amazing to me.

Vice Rep C ate her simmered pumpkin with tears streaming down her face.

DAY 54

MORNING

I don't want to conduct my scientific experiment on animals so I want to use monsters, but there aren't any.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I WOKE UP REFRESHED and prepared for an invigorating lecture. Round five was likely too much for her. It was either that or the morning rematch.

Then I got another lecture from the girls in the dining hall. Yup, they found out that I couldn't afford to pay my rent last night.

They went so far as to confiscate my next payment from the Adventurers' Guild. I'd only missed a rent payment twice, yet they were acting like tyrants! *At this rate you can kiss your shopping sprees goodbye!* Well, the Class Rep went ahead and paid my bills with it, so I shouldn't complain about her money management. However, delicious food was just as important! They ate a lot! If they ate any more pumpkin, they would become as round as pumpkins! But I wouldn't dare say that out loud. I definitely wasn't thinking about anything, and I especially wasn't looking at everyone's stomachs. Nope.

Time to escape! I mean, I'm just heading to the dungeon! Yeah, I swear, that was my plan all along!

The Class Rep—my Minister of Finance—scolded me whenever I overshot my budget for ingredients and crafting materials. *Don't get mad at me for looking at anyone's tummy! I didn't do it!*

"So, I went a little over budget, but profits and revenue are up. Point being, only a despot would criticize me for putting on a festival!"

Boing boing!

She probably found out that I bought up all the surplus pumpkins from that village. I was at that age where I could be sorely tempted by wholesale

bargains.

“The pumpkins won’t spoil if I keep them in my item bag. The Tiny Animal ordered extra pumpkin chips, too. Hmm, but those are pretty calorie-dense, aren’t they?”

Wiggle wiggle?

Well, we would all be bankrupt if the Class Rep hadn’t been managing our finances. The girls went shopping far too often. How were they any different from me?

“Did the Class Rep realize I’ve been ripping the girls off with what I charged for prismatic clothing? She must’ve spotted some suspicious numbers when she did her bookkeeping and accounting. I need to lower the price!”

It wasn’t my fault. I had to factor in the cost of labor. The person actually manufacturing the goods deserved a high salary, didn’t they? *Seems logical to me.* No matter how grossly I overcharged...I still couldn’t hold on to any damn ele! Raw materials didn’t come free, after all.

“Ooh, I know what I’ll do. I can just collect some rainy-day funds from the armory.”

I would lean on the old man if I had to, even if that meant holding him upside down and shaking him until coins fell out of his pockets! At least the Class Rep hadn’t discovered the money I made running a landscaping business with the demon scythes. She also didn’t know that the pseudo-dungeon provided some secret cash-flow too.

“So, I’m pretty sure that my plan for today is to go deal with the dungeon that the sports girls escaped from on the 48th floor. Apparently, they ran into monsters that wouldn’t die no matter how much they were attacked. Seems like the sports girls are also meatheads.”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

Anyway, I wanted to run some experiments today. I’d unlocked Void magic, but had no idea how to use it. In accordance with the scientific method, I would

conduct a technically complex experiment where I entangled my “Wooden Staff?” with Void and bludgeoned monsters with it. Since it and Teleport were different skills, it would logically produce different effects. Imbuing myself with Void sounded like a terrible idea; it would be safer to imbue my staff. Experimenting on animals was cruel, so I would experiment on monsters instead. Conducting trials was essential—I had learned my lesson about trying things without practicing first after I nearly caused a nuclear meltdown.

I ran through a few dungeon floors, smashing baddies, but I couldn’t see any difference in my attacks. I couldn’t tell whether I wasn’t using Entanglement properly, or if it simply had no effect.

“This is an important experiment, okay?”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

That was the correct response, but would they still annihilate all the monsters before I could run a single trial? Why did I feel like we spoke mutually unintelligible languages?

They certainly understood me clearly if I mentioned food or snacks. Besides, Miss Armor Rep had no problem speaking, so she definitely ignored me on purpose! This was her revenge on me for the morning, or perhaps for last night. Could this actually be retribution for that time I saw her getting out of the bath?!

Desperate to collect data, I charged pell-mell at the monsters. I wouldn’t even get in a single blow if I didn’t hurry!

I didn’t want to accidentally activate Dimension Blade, so I had to whack carefully. I hadn’t fought like this since I first arrived in this world. *Don’t forget where you came from, as they say*, I thought. I even screamed, “Hiyaah!” like some sort of amateur. I’d much rather forget those early days.

“Zoinks! I thought I saw a g-g-g-ghost! But it was already dead! It wasn’t a ghost at all...you just killed the monster too quick for me to see what it was!”

Boing boing!

We reached the middle floors without taking any breaks. Slimey seemed more powerful now, or maybe he was using a different fighting style. Did he look a little thinner?

I had never seen Miss Armor Rep fight seriously, so I didn't have any idea of how powerful she truly was. That was to be expected, but now I didn't understand Slimey's capabilities, either. It wasn't merely that Slimey bounced into action with erratic movements and an unpredictable fighting style; I thought he was evolving. I couldn't even begin to fathom how powerful Slimey might be. He was an emperor-tier monster, without a doubt.

"I'm not gathering enough data because of you! You won't let me hit any monsters myself!"

It seemed like Miss Armor Rep and Slimey were competing to see who could fight better. They were both trying way too hard!

We arrived on the 48th floor. From here on out, we were trespassing in unknown territory, the real mid-stage. This was a place for real battle, not experiments.

"Or not?"

With a flash of silver, a supernatural phenomenon slaughtered all the monsters as soon as I saw them!

"Good work, but what about me? I shifted into a cool battle stance but all the monsters are gone! You killed *all* of them. What am I supposed to do with my pose? It's not cool at all anymore!"

Jiggle jiggle.

Shrug shrug.

These two had no sympathy for me. They simply didn't have the aesthetic sensibilities of edgy twelve-year-old tryhards. The pointlessness of a pose was what made it cool!

The now-defeated monsters were gluttony wraiths. In their last moments, they met something even hungrier than them—Slimey wolfed them down. Did they taste any good?

“Well, you two are really energetic today, aren’t you?”

What was going on? Were they worried about me? After the battle with the Sand Giant, I suffered from a spate of dizziness, vertigo, nosebleeds, and a desire to make Hamburg steaks. *Is that why they’re trying so hard?* They didn’t need to worry; I wasn’t planning on making Hamburg steaks today.

Oh, speaking of which, what should I make for dinner tonight? I thought. I wanted to check if eggs were back in stock when I returned to town.

I had found a “Dual Robe: Intelligence +50%. Dual Cast” on the 44th floor and an “Anklet of Magic Defense: Magic resistance bonus (medium)” on this floor. *Not bad at all.*

When I saw the Dual Robe, I felt like I hit the jackpot. The 50% buff was awesome in itself, but not as awesome as Dual Cast. It likely worked similarly to my old parallel magic technique. A skill that doubled any spells cast was ideal for spellcasters. It would increase MP costs, but being able to cast a spell at two different targets simultaneously or to double the strength of any spell I cast was worth it.

I had a sudden premonition. Last night, I upgraded Vice Rep B’s robe with mithril. She said that it was tight in the bust, so I adjusted the fit. I had to take new measurements. *It was pretty hard, if you know what I mean.* After all, there was so much swaying and jiggling, I couldn’t focus. I was criticized harshly afterwards.

“Seriously, what timing.”

The Dual Robe almost certainly hemorrhaged a ridiculous amount of MP. Although parallel casting was a devastating, rapid-fire technique, it was not an efficient use of MP. Bombarding enemies with spells cost a tremendous amount. And for unknown reasons, Vice Rep B had more MP than any of my classmates. Though I had never seen her cast a single spell before, she was endowed with the most MP. Did she store all that extra MP in her chest? That’s why she had such colossal...talent. *Ahem, ahem!*

Phew. Nothing was as relaxing as the glare Miss Armor Rep gave me.

“Should I give this robe to Vice Rep B?”

Nod nod.

Jiggle jiggle.

Also, in a recurring nightmare (for her), Miss Armor Rep was the recipient of another reckless attack in the dead of night. Although she did get a thorough revenge this morning.

The Anklet of Magic Defense was a decent item, more or less, but that wasn't what interested me. The concept itself was spectacular!

"Look! You can equip gear on your ankles! I haven't even considered this possibility!"

Wiggle wiggle?!

I had never seen anyone wear anklets in this world, but now I'd unearthed this wonderful treasure! This discovery was unprecedented, and it wasn't just because of my predilections. It had mediocre stats, though.

Oh well, I would just have to make my own. Not because I had a fetish; they were just an extra accessory slot! I could hardly contain my desire to take Miss Armor Rep's clothes off and have her wear nothing but an anklet. And that would just be the beginning! She was doing the dagger thing at me again.

"Well, more places to wear equipment would benefit all of us, right? This item proves that girls have two more equipment slots we hadn't even considered!"

Wiggle wiggle?

I preferred when girls wore an anklet on only one leg, but both legs could be equipped—that was huge if true!

"I have to mass-produce these right away! It's for the safety of my classmates, I swear! It will make them all more effective in combat, but most importantly, it will make Miss Armor Rep even more effective in bed! As a teenage boy, I swear that I'll—Ugh! Ack! Ouch! Eep!"

Boing boing!

Well, she was mad at me again.

"I don't want the nerds and meatheads finding out that these exist, though.

Maybe I could make a special model just for them that comes attached to an iron ball and chain. That would look great on them! Since those nerds like striped clothes so much, I can make striped uniforms for them to go with the shackles.”

I basked in the harsh radiance of her glare. My worries dissipated and my soul was at ease.

We reached the 49th floor. Since I was only level 21, this was seriously dangerous territory. We had to tread carefully. And when my companions least expected it, I would charge in and—

“Oh, come on, Slimey! Wait for me! You started the race early! Didn’t I just tell you that we had to take this floor slowly? You’re using high-speed movement techniques!”

Jiggle jiggle jiggle!

Why did my thralls ignore everything I said?! Even my demon scythes ignored me. I only asked them to clear the forest, but they somehow kept gaining levels. They were definitely hunting monsters for experience.

“Why won’t any of you listen to me? Do you think I *want* to talk to myself? You only pay attention to me when I announce dinner!”

Boing boing!

I used Magic Entanglement and charged in only to find that the level 49 Dark Panthers had literally vanished into the darkness. They did possess a skill that allowed them to do that, but they vanished in a much more permanent sense. I maintained my badass action pose, hoping that there was just one survivor for me to fight, but they were gone.

“Why do panthers with the ability to hide in the shadows get sliced apart and eaten so easily? This is the second floor in a row where I did nothing but strike a cool pose, you know? This stance is pretty hard to maintain...my leg is cramping up! Argh!”

Wiggle wiggle?

Miss Armor Rep and Slimey massaged the knots out of my leg, and we

proceeded to the 50th floor. I wanted to return the favor, but it's hard to massage someone in full plate. Although maybe I could use Void magic to do it. *Eureka! I'm a natural born genius! I'll have to practice this technique later tonight.* I vowed to show Miss Armor Rep the wondrous powers of the Void. *She's mad again.*

Something inside me wavered. We were about to face a boss battle, and I knew it would be a tough battle. I knew it!

"Stay on guard; we're about to encounter a boss monster. I'm not kidding or trying to trick you this time. Be so on guard that you can't even believe how on guard you are. Got it? Be prepared for anything, including the things you didn't think of, y'know?"

As the leader of the team, I had the duty and the responsibility to command my followers. Even if they ignored everything I had ever said and ditched me.

"So take it slow—hey, I'm still talking. Why are you leaving?! I have something important to tell you! Just because you donned your helmet doesn't mean you can ignore me! Are you listening? Pay attention to me!"

All right, time to go. They weren't waiting for me, anyway.

DAY 54

LATE MORNING

The monsters went extinct before I could even take a picture.

A DUNGEON

50TH FLOOR

I *CAN'T BEAR this torture any longer. This is hopeless.* These thoughts raced through my mind as I looked at the horse.

The horse belonged to the mid-boss, a level 50 Dullahan. The headless knight had been sliced into pieces, and those pieces were being diced into even smaller pieces. It dropped its severed head, which Slimey promptly ate.

Jiggle jiggle.

Meanwhile the horse and I stared at each other, both distraught at the situation but for very different reasons—dammit, Slimey just ate the horse.

“I thought you’d let me at least fight a damn horse! Greed and Gluttony, you merciless pair, why can’t you give me a break?! Slimey ate the horse the moment I posed again! You did that on purpose, didn’t you?!”

Boing boing boing!

I was definitely being bullied, but if we went to an anti-bullying resource center, Slimey would just eat the counselors. I was certain that they would bully people concerned with preventing bullying.

“Well, good work. I’m tired, specifically tired of not getting to do anything but complain about how tired I am, so I might as well complain in the form of a song! Dungeon karaoke is about to begin! I will sing a passionate ballad about certain people kill-stealing and the universe conspiring to ruin my sex appeal! *Maybe! ♪ Maybe not! ♪ Do re mi, baby! ♪*”

I tried to make it sound a bit operatic.

Slimey brought the spellstone and loot over to me. “Brought” might be too nice a word—Slimey wobbled over and horked up the treasures. *Leftovers?* Was Slimey a picky eater? Well, I was glad that he didn’t eat them. Oh, and it went without saying that they paid no attention to my song.

The Dullahan had dropped some armor, but Miss Armor Rep wasn’t interested. Apparently, she was unimpressed by equipment from the 50th floor, as if it was beneath her.

Didn’t she used to be a Dullahan? She worked three different jobs at the time, so it seemed she felt no attachment to being a Dullahan. She also felt no mercy for me, the way she pretended not to have heard my singing. *I’m gonna cry!*

“This dungeon seems deeper, I think? Well, the deeper we go, the better the treasure, but also the longer this’ll take, y’know?”

Wiggle wiggle.

I couldn’t find a single good piece of real estate anywhere. I had to pay my rent yesterday, and my guild payment was confiscated. I got all my money from the general store at least, but it didn’t amount to much. The road to wealth was long and difficult.

Jiggle jiggle.

While Slimey offered me some timely life advice, we advanced to the next floor.

Miss Armor Rep continued to ignore me. Was she upset about something? Why? Well, there were plenty of reasons to be upset with me, so much so that determining the specific reason was like trying to find a grain of sand in a desert. If I had to guess, she was probably still a bit mortified by the fishnet body stocking—*Ahhh!*

“I-I’m not fondly recalling anything! Please, put down your sword! Wait, we’re in a dungeon. Keep your sword! Just don’t stab me, okay? This is why Teleport keeps leveling so fast!”

Teleportation had become my most reliable method of evading attacks. I would have appreciated some advanced warning before she tried to skewer me. Although, I wouldn't be particularly happy if she said, "I'm going to stab you," right before stabbing me.

Regardless, I was still completely innocent of all thought-crimes. The memories were just seared into my mind. I wasn't *trying* to remember it. The memories just happened! *I'm innocent, I tell ya!* Jupiter Eye was an incredible skill; it could even store images.

It seemed that a rematch after five rounds of fishnet action was too much for her. But my actions were fully justified: after the fifth round, I had nothing to do besides my side gig for the rest of the night, but I could see her naked back, and it tried to tempt me to come to bed! I stayed strong, wrestling with my desires the entire night! Until the duvet slipped, and I saw the curves of her butt wrapped in fishnet! I'm just a teen boy! *Don't ask me to do the impossible!* At that point, I reconciled with my worldly desires, we reached a mutual understanding, and charged in together!

The sight was simply too wonderful. Her voluptuous curves, the fishnet tight enough to accentuate the soft roundness of her—*Ahhh!*

"Whoa! Can't you give me a warning at least? I was trying to concentrate!"

That was close. Her sword almost stabbed me. *I'll just stab her back tonight.* So went our cycle of lust and revenge, which played out in full every night.

"I'm telling you, I'm not remembering anything! I was just watching a video replay—ouch!"

She knocked me around like a ragdoll.

As self-conscious as she was, Miss Armor Rep was certainly enthusiastic about the idea last night. If I said that out loud, she would probably cut me in half. I could already sense her taking aim at my back. The most dangerous part of dungeon crawling was your allies!

Using Area Analyze and Map, we made easy progress through the dungeon. Listening to the conversations at the inn made getting lost in a dungeon sound kind of fun, though.

They talked about running into dead ends, or getting confused by a dungeon with forking paths. Now that I thought about it, Slimey and Miss Armor Rep never got lost either. They always moved as if they had a map, as well. I wouldn't be surprised if they had the skill. The demon scythes also navigated the forest like they knew the exact location of my cave. Did my Map skill get shared with all of them?

I was still unsure how I got the Sword Master skill. I didn't know the first thing about sword fighting, yet I was apparently a Sword Master! Technically, I sliced through things all the time. *But I'm not using a sword. It's a stick.* A certain silver-white servant of mine had the Sword Goddess skill and the Trueblade title. Did some of her skill flow into me?

I had assumed that Servitude only shared experience points between us, but if my servants could use my Map skill, that meant information was shared, too. Did that apply to all skills?

"Huh."

Wiggle wiggle?

I had no way to verify my theory. Reflecting on it, I noticed that the mean girls were the first to learn Presence Detection and Enemy Tracking.

"However, everyone learned Vibration magic at the same time. The girls must have a lot of knots in their shoulders. Their necks didn't seem stiff, but they leveled up Vibration at an absurdly quick rate. Why was that?"

Jiggle jiggle!

Every time I asked them, they just yelled at me.

There were too many things I didn't understand and not trying to figure those things out always caused me trouble. For example, my skills had a history of hiding, lying to me, then appearing in my skill list unannounced. My skills wouldn't appear unless I began to suspect, investigate, and solve their mysteries.

"Could there be a rule in this fantasy world such that you have to search for and uncover your own skills?"

Boing boing?

However, all of my skills were suspicious. I didn't have a single respectable, upstanding skill to my name!

The predecessor of Body Manipulation was a skill called Calisthenics. That stupid skill name tricked me into doing radio program exercise routines every damn morning! *Still, it was good exercise.*

Then there was General Health, still stuck at level 9. That was one was super suspect. I had fallen to the lowest level of the Ultimate Dungeon and fought countless times against vicious monsters...though I technically didn't actually fight. Regardless, I stayed healthy the entire time, and even when I went up against monsters that inflicted high-level status ailments, I remained hale and hearty.

Even when what's-his-face used Instant Kill attacks with a hundred-percent success rate, I survived with no ill effects. Indeed, I was the only person to never get poisoned so far.

Well, I was super weak, so if any of those attacks landed I would've died. Still, I walked right through the poisonous dust of the level 97 Venom Moths and the secretions of the level 96 Venom Crawlers with no ill effect. Wasn't I a little *too* healthy? Did all my calisthenics really help that much? How could exercises make me immune to poison?

"I'm bored!"

All my skills were so suspicious that I wondered if this was a plot by Agatha Christie, or perhaps even Ellery Queen. That geezer who claimed he was God did say something about how you needed to understand a skill to fully master it. I had to understand the meaning and the path of a skill, and only then would I know the souls that became these mysterious skills. I didn't want to get to know the souls of my skills! I was too busy falling down holes and averting nuclear disasters! I didn't have time for meaning!

"Why don't I ever get to fight any monsters in dungeons? That's what you expect when you hear someone's going into a dungeon! When I get there, they're already spellstones. Something's wrong here!"

There was definitely something wrong with dungeon crawling without the opportunity to fight monsters. A dungeon without pulse-quickening battle is just a cave putting on airs!

“No matter how deeply lost in thought I become, I never get in any trouble. I just walk serenely through a pleasant and peaceful dungeon—am I writing an advertisement? Who’s selling dungeon properties? Why didn’t anyone inform me? Am I banned from touring the properties? Is this my punishment for renovating without permission?”

I made it to the 55th floor without encountering a single monster. There was no boss on this floor, either. In the Ultimate Dungeon, there was a boss every five floors starting from the 75th floor. I seemed to recall that boss floors were a lot easier to deal with...maybe boss fights were some kind of bonus?

This dungeon probably didn’t have a hundred floors. It didn’t have that same atmosphere of dread as the Ultimate Dungeon, and it probably didn’t have a cute girl on the lowest level, either. The extra pair of fishnet stockings I’d prepared was for nothing!

“Come to think of it, you were a skeleton when we met. Hmm, I need to make sure any skeletons I encounter aren’t hot girls before I kill them. Though I don’t think I can trust any skeleton that claims to be a cutie. They might be trying to trick me! It’s easy to say you were cute when you were alive if you don’t have flesh! I can’t trust them even if they show me a picture! It could be photoshopped!”

Jiggle jiggle!

I wouldn’t let myself get fooled by a skeleton’s selfies. They were nothing but bones. Anyway, the skeletons were always pulverized into bone meal before they could even show me a picture. It was wrong of me to think I could meet monsters in a dungeon. *Such is loner life in another world.*

DAY 54

LATE MORNING

Angry Slimey's a cutey, but Miss Armor Rep's got that booty.

A DUNGEON

59TH FLOOR

THE DUNGEON WAS DEEPER than I expected. I wanted to invite Slimey over to my cave after we finished lunch, but it looked like the dungeon expedition was going to take too long for that. When was I ever going to get an opportunity to go back to my cave home? *I'm keeping it a secret for now, but I've developed a soap that can be used for bubble baths in the hot tub.* I spent some moments imagining a certain curvaceous figure and smooth skin veiled by bubbles... *Oh shit! I feel a bloodthirsty aura nearby but there are no monsters around!*

"My classmates could handle these floors. The monsters are strong, but not too strong, and tend to be direct attackers."

Did I make a mistake? Maybe Slimey and the Sand Giant were unique encounters.

Nod nod, jiggle jiggle.

This dungeon seemed to be on the easy side; Miss Armor Rep and Slimey soundlessly agreed.

Why was Miss Armor Rep sounding more and more like Slimey?! They were practically the same character at this point!

What if she started to jiggle? Well, she already does every night, though it was more spectacular than any mere jiggle can describe. Miss Armor Rep raised her sword toward me, so I rushed ahead. She was probably just preparing to fight monsters, even though her sword was pointed right at my neck.

“Still, what a waste of experience,” I sighed.

The vanishing and reappearing Dullahan was dangerous, but the girls could’ve handled it. The dark panthers, on the other hand, would have been way more trouble. That is, unless someone cast Light magic to erase the shadows. Then they were just big cats. Maybe I was being overprotective. Slimey was an unusual specimen, and the Sand Giant used the power of the Treasure of the Monster Core.

Three parties working together could’ve easily reached the 60th floor, but the monsters from the 50th floor onward were like another difficulty tier higher. They needed to fight trash mobs to grind for experience points. Even the slightest risk of danger was off the table. If there was even a possibility of death, they had to escape to the inn and shut themselves in their rooms! That was the best response. Speaking of getting the best response, I wouldn’t be surprised if I got Sex Moves as a skill. Though she would scold me if that skill got shared!

“Oh, look.”

Jiggle jiggle.

The treasure chests in hidden rooms often had great treasures, but they didn’t restock on separate visits. At the least, it probably took a while for treasure to repopulate. Dungeons that were more than fifty floors deep were more likely to overflow with monsters. If the Dark Panthers on floor 49 got out of the dungeon at night, it would be incredibly dangerous to fight them.

“Well, I still haven’t gotten to fight, but at least I’ve got energy...but if I have too much of that tonight, I’m gonna get beat up!”

This world was so unfair. I found a cloak on the 57th floor and inspected it: “The Mantle of the Void: Evasion (medium). Physical and magic absorption. Storage.”

I really wanted to keep it. It was able to store items, and it was an inky black with a deep crimson lining. Maybe it was reversible.

It looked cool and Miss Armor Rep could totally pull it off, so I think she wanted it. Oh! That explained why she was sulking. She hadn’t plundered any

treasure in a while! Naturally, she was so upset that she kept trying to stab me! I knew it wasn't my fault. I decided that I would offer the mantle to her tonight!

"Yeah, this cloak would look great on you. Plus, it has pockets! It's also reversible, so you get double the fashion! The fabric feels so luxurious and expensive, too."

Hold on, I felt the fabric of the cloak I was wearing and realized that it was made of the cheapest possible sackcloth! *Is this a classist fantasy world?* I supposed that it *was* a feudal society with aristocrats and serfs, after all.

Miss Armor Rep encouraged me to keep the equipment, but if I fused the mantle into my cloak, it would still look like a cheap, black cloak. What a waste of luxury materials that would've been.

I begrudgingly had to admit that the cheap cloak suited me better. I pondered why that could be. What was the world trying to say about me?!

"Is this world trying to tell me something? Well, that's how it was back in the old world, but...am I getting dissed by my cloak?!"

Miss Armor Rep dramatically swished her new cloak and stored all her extra swords in it. And now she was showing it off in front of Slimey! How childish.

"I could take your used Storage Cloak. The one with Item Storage, Evasion, Magic Defense, Slash Endurance, Stab Endurance, and Bludgeon Resistance. But I think we're better off auctioning it to my classmates."

There was never enough equipment to go around for thirty people. Too many items would typically become a burden, but that was never a problem for me because I could fuse extra equipment into my basic gear.

Besides, I had a decent Evasion bonus from my Fairy Ring. Just today, I evaded seventeen attempts on my life! Of course, none of those attacks came from monsters.

"Just living my normal life is the more dangerous path for me, isn't it?"

Jiggle jiggle.

There was no faster and deadlier attack in this world than one caused by embarrassment. That wasn't a joke.

We arrived on the 60th floor, but it still wasn't the final one. *This dungeon sure is deep.*

A sudden bolt of lightning—the world flashed white.

I couldn't move out of the way in time, even with Future Sight, so I swung my staff instead.

When we entered the room, an enormous, muscular bull wreathed in sparks charged at us. It had long, curving horns and a thick, red-black hide. As it stampeded, lightning crackled from its horns. Miss Armor Rep lopped off its legs, Slimey stopped it in its tracks, and I brained it with a stick until it died.

"I saw the trajectory of the attack, and my staff can absorb magic attacks, so all I needed to do was attack, y'know? Most problems in this world can be solved by hitting them with a stick over and over and over again until they're not a problem anymore. Just don't stop whacking. It's that simple, really. Oh, the Level 60 Thunderbolt Bull isn't moving anymore? The poor thing is mooing so miserably as it gets eaten. Yikes."

Jiggle jiggle!

Miss Armor Rep liked her brand-new mantle.

"You just wanted your new cloak so that you could flap it behind you, didn't you? You're just showboating now."

Wiggle wiggle.

Miss Armor Rep flourished her cloak to make herself look impressive. She even struck a pose! That was a tough cow, but it vanished with a moo into Slimey's maw. Slimey looked like he enjoyed the taste. *Fine with me, saves on food expenses.*

Then Slimey regurgitated the spellstone and item drop.

"Where does a bull keep its loot, anyway?"

Wiggle wiggle?

It was a precious gem: "Thunderbeast Stone: Shock. Thunderbolt (large).

Magic absorption.” Is this a kidney stone? Was the bull sick or something? It looked like a legendary god-beast, but it was just trying to pass some kidney stones? *Get well soon, bull.* It was too late for that, unfortunately. There was no getting better after getting eaten.

Jiggle jiggle!

“Huh, you want it? Do you know where this has been? It’s pretty dirty; I don’t want you to get sick. Well, I don’t think slimes get sick, so go ahead. You can really still eat?”

Wiggle wiggle.

Since the slime’s body was completely amorphous, I didn’t have to worry about the stone getting stuck and giving him indigestion.

Slimey seemed healthy enough, so I could give him the stone...but would a Thunderbeast Stone turn Slimey into a beast? A Slime-beast? I thought, *There’s no way I’ll bring one of those back to the inn!* There were too many things I didn’t know! At least, Slimey swallowed the stone with a look of satisfaction.

“Back when we met, your body was yellow and covered in lightning, so maybe this will come in handy? It has magic absorption, so maybe that can replace some of your food.”

Still, Slimey always went for delicious food, so maybe he treated stones and food differently. He could freely control his size, growing larger or smaller. The girls always looked at Slimey with a hint of jealousy—mostly because of how much he could eat. I definitely would not say that where they could hear me. *I can think of no act more terrifying.*

“This dungeon is full of awesome finds! I’m gonna be rich! Am I going to return to my bigshot lifestyle? It’s all gonna sell. I’m definitely going to run another auction.”

Jiggle jiggle.

The loot was good, and the secret room treasure chests had gems. I would’ve renovated the first floor and lived here until it ripened to a full hundred floors if the first floor didn’t have such an awkward layout.

On the 63rd floor, I found the “Morning Star of Altered Weight: Weight Alteration. Power +30%. Attack bonus.” I finally found a new type of weapon, a spiked mace. My classmates had a lot of swords, but no morning star. Plus, a frequent high bidder, the Shield Girl, would probably want it. I could expect a big return off of this one!

“Did I just hit the jackpot? I’m going to be rich! I’ll give out some sweets when I get back, the noblesse oblige of a wealthy man!”

Wiggle wiggle!

Soon, I could make pudding. The problem was the egg supply. I needed to make some major investments in poultry. I also wanted to make ice cream. But first—the lovely Miss Pudding! No more putting off pudding! Besides, I wanted Miss Armor Rep to have some jiggling pudding, and then we could jiggle all night long!

“Whoa, wait! Not the morning star! It’s not easy to dodge! You set it to maximum weight, too! You hit the ground once and now cracks are spreading! It looks like a spiderweb! I’ll look just like that if you hit me!”

(Lecture omitted.)

In short, she was annoyed with me. But I was inspired! Spiderwebs! *Stockings and tights with spiderweb patterns!* Maybe I could make a spiderweb patterned fishnet body stocking and—

“Oof! No, I asked you not to use the morning star! It’s so hard to dodge! Okay, okay, I’m sorry!”

She was seriously pissed again. How did she know what I was thinking? *Oh no*, I thought. Were my thoughts being shared? Everything I fantasized about? No wonder she was pissed! Those were *filthy*. From now on, I vowed to never again think a dirty thought. Miss Armor Rep’s face was bright red.

Sharing 18+ content with an eternal seventeen-year-old would get me in trouble. Not that I seriously planned on stopping. *No way.*

DAY 54

AFTERNOON

We were headed there anyway, so even though I'm fleeing there just pretend I'm headed there.

A DUNGEON

68TH FLOOR

AFTER ALL THAT SUFFERING, I wish I could've at least gotten a smooch when I left for work. The wounds in my heart didn't fade, but at least I could poke Slimey and watch him quiver. I really wanted to make Miss Armor Rep quiver, but her murderous glare flooded the entire floor whenever I thought like that.

"Well, that's...interesting, I guess?"

Jiggle jiggle.

The deeper we went, the more amazing things were supposed to get, so I had big hopes.

"My expectations are too high. I've never been to Tokyo Dome, so I don't know how many Tokyo Domes worth of anticipation I felt, but it has to be more amazing than one Tokyo Dome, right? Suffice it to say, my expectations are as big as Tokyo Dome. Tokyo Dome *is* big, right? Like I said, I've never been."

Jiggle jiggle.

I couldn't help but complain right now. On the 68th floor, we faced some formidable foes. No, perhaps the archetypal formidable foes, level 68 Doppelgangers. They looked just like Miss Armor Rep, so they had to be the same strength as her—which meant they were more formidable than anything I had previously faced.

"Multiple Miss Armor Rep doppelgangers should be totally invincible, right?"

We'll never win! What? She just shredded them like they were confetti! I guess the mass production units really don't compare to the OG Miss Armor Rep, y'know?"

I couldn't lie, seeing all those doppelgangers made me excited, in more ways than one.

At the same time, Slimey was enjoying an afternoon snack. *Those poor doppelgangers*. They tried their best with Mimesis, y'know? But they were trying and failing to duplicate Slimey's amorphous form only to get devoured. Though they tried capture the essence of Slimey, they only became Slimey's munchies. They didn't even get their chance! Were they tasty, at least?

Meanwhile, I was surrounded.

The doppelgangers chanted, "Screw you, screw you, screw you, screw you, screw you, screw you, screw you! Mwa ha ha ha!"

They were supposed to look exactly like me, but for some reason they became monsters with fiendish demon eyes that reflected the very depths of hell itself.

"That's not what I look like! If a guy like that was walking around on the street, he'd make pedestrians freeze with a glance! That's ridiculous, my eyes are nothing like that! This is just mean! No human has eyes like that, right? That's an exaggeration, right? I would never be able to make friends with eyes like those. Not that I have any friends. But that's because I'm a loner, okay? Wait...no, this can't be. This can't be! Please say it ain't so!"

I smashed them up. For some reason, someone came over and started patting me on the back. Even Slimey came over, ready to console me. Did they prepare for this? *All right, I'll accept it.*

That was a real nightmare, but the treasure chest had the "Estoc of Corrosion: Power, Speed, Dexterity +30%. Equipment Corrosion." An item with three 30% boosts was excellent, but Equipment Corrosion seemed like a pretty dubious ability.

"Most monsters are the Nudist Girl's comrades-in-arms, so they tend to wear nothing, right? Although, the Nudist Girl does wear equipment, she just finds

excuses to take it all off. I don't get it, either."

Wiggle wiggle.

The fact that it was an estoc was even more baffling. It was a thin blade designed for stabbing—an antipersonnel weapon that could pierce armor but couldn't be used to block or cut.

"Speaking of antipersonnel, where are the nerds? They're always asking to get stabbed, y'know? We worked so hard to get this sword, let's not waste the opportunity, right?"

Jiggle jiggle.

If the effect was Clothes Disintegration, I would've been all in. But the only times I fought other people, they were all ugly middle-aged men!

"It would suck if I accidentally used Clothes Disintegration on a bunch of geezers!"

My mind would've been destroyed by that sight. Fighting naked old dudes?! Why was a fantasy world swarming with so many old guys?!

What if I had been teleported to a fantasy world where everyone was a hairy old man? I wouldn't bother saving anyone from monsters. They could destroy everything for all I cared. That would be *totally* fine with me. Actually, maybe I should do it myself?

"I can't stand this! What was with those vicious, hideous, horribly sinister eyes?! No one has eyes like that! If so, they'd need an eyepatch! One for each eye! Or better yet, a blindfold!"

Dungeons were supposed to be physically dangerous, but the only damage I took was to my mind, my feelings, and my reputation!

"A blindfold...blindfolded in the bedroom...now that's an idea—nope, not saying anything, so don't stab me! The morning star in your right hand and the estoc in your left, I can't dodge that! I literally can't! So please don't? I'm being serious. Please don't?"

I tried to apologize! She had to accept that. Why was I so good at making mistakes? Because that's all I ever did! Mistakes, misunderstandings, mishaps,

missteps—they were my specialties. Y’know?

As I dodged the attempts on my life, trying to blank out any images of blindfold play from my mind, we went down to the 69th floor. One could say that I was actually running away, but we were going to go there anyway. It was our destination, after all. I was just getting a head-start! I couldn’t stop, though. There’d be trouble if I did. The mental images weren’t my fault. The fishnet body stocking that Miss Armor Rep wore last night was too fresh in my mind. It was a danger to teen boys. *Throw in a blindfold and I don’t stand a chance!* It was too powerful a combination!

(EXTREME VIOLENCE, MEDICAL TREATMENTS, AND CONVALESCENCE EXCISED.)

I expected a stab, but she went for the full morning star to the face! That hurt a lot.

“I went flying even though it barely grazed me! I nullified the attack with my left Spearshield Gauntlet, too! Come to think of it, all the items I got from the Ultimate Dungeon were meant to deal with you!”

It made perfect sense. If I went through the dungeon the normal way, I would have gotten the Spearshield Gauntlets before I fought Miss Armor Rep on the final floor. Well, we’d be fighting again tonight, that was for sure. Every night was a new counterattack! *Bring it on! And...no, I won’t think of anything! Let’s just keep walking, okay?* I’m going to finally fight some monsters, after all! Probably.

Imbue and attack. With one breath, I entangled my weapon with magic and slashed while stepping forward—my classic Life or Death attack was the only thing that actually worked. Level 70 monsters couldn’t otherwise die in one hit. Sure, it’s what I always used, but I literally didn’t have a choice.

Although now that I was over level 20, I could use the weapon technique Slash Something. What was it called?

“Weapon techniques only activate when you say their name, so if you don’t know the name you can’t activate it. So, uh, I guess I can’t do anything else,

y'know? I can use weapon techniques, but I actually can't. I just tend to forget names, which means I can't, I think?"

Wiggle wiggle?

In conclusion: no weapon techniques.

When a weapon technique was activated, it moved the body in accordance with that skill. In other words, the user couldn't do any other movements while using them. And for a split-second, they froze. The wind-up before powerful weapon techniques made me especially vulnerable, as any attack just then would instantly kill me. I couldn't use weapon techniques because I would die. They were absolutely not worth my time.

So, I stepped forward to dodge an attack, and in the same moment I brought down my staff, finishing the cut as my left foot touched the ground.

That's all I could do. I had to kill my foes before they killed me.

I advanced, swinging my staff with each step.

A step, followed by another, and every step ended a life. Smoothing out unnecessary motions, grinding down the enemy, until every movement was precise. I had to keep going; if I stopped, I would've died.

"I think we're done, maybe? These level 69 monsters had scary high stats: they were in the 700s! Twice as fast, twice as strong, and twice as sturdy as me! That's insane!"

Wiggle wiggle.

All things being equal, monsters were more powerful than humans who had the same exact stats.

"Humans are weak on a basic level. Also, screw fighting flame cougars! There's no such thing as a fight between a human and a cougar! That's just called 'being attacked by a cougar.' And we're not on an even playing field here! They've got double the stats that I do *and* they're on fire; I can't stand up to that! If they were burning with twice the soothing cuteness of regular cats, I'd like that, though. Please? I'll put up some ads, maybe!"

Jiggle jiggle.

Why did I suspect that no one would answer an ad for an emotional support monster? So far, the only therapeutic monster I'd found was Slimey. Every other monster I got to know was a rock, a scythe, or a mean girl.

"I don't think rocks or scythes will be particularly therapeutic. A high school boy contentedly stroking a scythe would look nothing short of deranged."

While Miss Armor Rep wasn't a therapy monster, she did have certain soothing qualities. Especially her—nope, I wasn't thinking anything. *Now, now, let us proceed (waves stick).*

It needn't be said that the monsters on these lower floors were tough. The level 69 Flame Cougars had phenomenal speed and agility, and powerful, supple musculature that they used to attack with deadly fangs and claws. I was kind of jealous of their paws.

"They're tough, but they're nothing compared to the person spinning the morning star at high speeds while glaring back at me. Is she swinging it more aggressively now? Could she be hoping for some—nope, that's not what I mean! I'm not thinking anything! Well, maybe a little bit?"

Maybe some lotion could be fun with the fishnet body stocking. Besides, I'd already made a blindfold about five minutes ago.

Jiggle jiggle!

Understood, Slimey. I'll be right there! My deep apologies!

Now Slimey was mad at me. Where did my sweet emotional support monster go? Maybe I should try petting rocks next time. *How soothing would a pet rock be?*

DAY 54

MORNING

The general store lady's youth ended ages ago...nope, I wasn't saying anything!

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

HE GOT AWAY. I knew he was spending money again. He couldn't hide anything so long as Angelica was around. More importantly, we were staying at the same inn, so of course we would find out that he hadn't paid his rent!

"How could he spend the money that I specifically set aside for the inn fees?!"

"Well, you know," the other girls chorused.

Yes, we all know. He found a village that had nothing but pumpkins. Every other crop had died from disease. So, he bought every pumpkin they had. He even signed a futures contract in a fantasy world with people he had never met before. In exchange, he gave them a massive amount of wheat, medicinal mushrooms, and foodstuffs. He also gave them every last ele he had on hand. Then, he agreed to buy pumpkin harvests for years in advance. He returned to the inn without a single ele to his name.

"I know why but...come on!"

"He needs to take a rest."

"Now he just has more work."

"Well, that's kind of our fault for putting in more orders?"

"He should work slower. He's pulling all-nighters every night!"

"Right?"

How many villages had he done this with? Easily in the double digits, if I had to guess. I couldn't really be angry with him. After all, that village had nothing

but pumpkins.

It was as poor as the potato village from last time, but they also had no access to medicine.

He did the exact same thing with the cabbage hamlet. None of these towns traded with each other, and as a result, they were all mired in poverty. So, Haruka-kun bought from all of them and flooded their villages with wealth.

The other reason I couldn't be mad at him...was that he was bringing in ridiculous profits. The general store lady bought up massive amounts of goods from him, and now those goods were starting to circulate throughout the duchy. He just frittered away those profits immediately. The duke's concerns were well founded.

Haruka-kun was trying to make the whole frontier wealthy by himself, yet he remained poor. He owed the inn money, even as he stayed here every night! I knew he didn't like that I managed his money for him, but it was necessary. How could someone earn millions of ele in a single day without being able to afford to pay his ten thousand ele in rent?! He even got a great discount for the three of them together! The repeat offender was back to his old ways. That was why I confiscated his money time and again. He always worked so hard, but he never had cash.

At first, I only collected twenty percent of everyone's spellstone profits to pay for room and board and other basic necessities. But Haruka-kun and Vice Reps B and C went bankrupt on the very first day. So, I started collecting thirty percent of their income. Then the next day, Haruka-kun and Vice Rep B went bankrupt again, so I kept forty percent. *You'll never guess what happened next.* Of course, he spent all his money, and I increased the tax rate another ten percent.

Ever since then, Haruka-kun came back flat broke. I confiscated his money whenever I discovered another revenue stream that he didn't disclose, but he kept making the same mistake every single day.

"Is he seriously bribing the Poster Girl with candy instead of paying his bills?!"

We split up food costs equally, but seconds cost extra, and desserts were sold separately. He also sold clothes, weapons, armor, and accessories. It was safe to

say that most of the money that the girls saved went straight to Haruka-kun. Especially given that any money spent at the general store found its way back to him eventually.

“You boys never offer to buy us dessert!” Shimazaki-san pouted.

“We can’t afford to pay for all those desserts,” replied Oda-kun.

“Like, girls have an extra stomach just for dessert!”

The guys were ripped off even worse. According to Stalker Girl, Haruka-kun sold striped knee socks to the nerds at ten times the market rate. *Seriously, Oda-kun?*

Haruka-kun raked in staggering amounts of money daily. Even considering only the money made from dungeons, he made more than all of us, at least several million ele every single day. Factor in the auctions, and he probably made ten times that amount...but he remained poor instead.

Like clockwork, he went bankrupt before the day’s end, and I paid his rent every morning with some of the money from the savings I confiscated. Apparently, he sometimes paid his rent by bartering...how was he able to pay for a room with buckets?

“No matter what, he spends any money he makes.”

“He probably has other revenue streams that we don’t even know about.”

“Yeah, have you seen the armory? It’s way bigger than it used to be.”

The once-destitute frontier was growing. There was no logical way it could have changed its fortunes so fast...yet it had.

“Taking a closer look at my accounts book, pretty much all of our money goes straight to Haruka-kun.”

“Well, he’s totally monopolized the markets for food and fashion.”

“Makes sense when you think about it.”

To put it plainly, he made an incredible amount of money. Every day, he went further into more dangerous dungeons than anyone in this world ever had before. Yet it was somehow never enough for him. And despite his prodigal

habits, he had probably never bought a single thing for himself!

“Do we actually need to pay what we owe him?”

“No way! He’ll just burn through all that money in a day!”

Whenever someone felt melancholy, he made them a delicious meal. He gave away all his money to villages in need. When someone was homesick, he whipped up a new line of clothes. If we ever tried to properly compensate him, that money went straight down the drain.

“If the village he bought the fabric from got into trouble, he’d invest all his fortune without a second thought, right?”

“Seriously, how can you make so much money and yet be so poor?”

There would always be more for him to do. The frontier was too large and too populous for him to be able to help everyone. Even if people got significantly wealthier, the wealth wouldn’t reach the furthest corners of the frontier. One person couldn’t bear that burden alone. It was impossible. It would destroy him.

“Well, we need to keep placing orders so he can make money.”

“But then he’ll just keep working and never rest.”

“And he’ll spend it anyway!”

“Definitely.”

He would spend any money we gave to him, rent money included. At least it seemed like he would never run out of food, and he could always go back to the cave if he couldn’t afford the inn. That was probably what he was thinking. He had no attachment to money. He just had things he wanted to have, food he wanted to eat, and didn’t think twice about the cost. Scolding him about it wouldn’t change anything.

“He’s also giving Angelica and Slimey a healthy allowance.”

“They spent their entire lives until now trapped in a dungeon, right?”

He probably was off finding some poor village, someone crying somewhere, and doing the same thing. No matter how much money it cost, he would do this

until there were no more crying people anywhere in the world.

“Do you think he’s going to avoid sleeping until the whole frontier is rich?”

“That’s terrible for his health!”

“Definitely not good.”

“But he won’t listen, no matter what we tell him...”

Whenever we tried to explain this to him, he always rambled about how he was innocent of all crimes and stopped listening.

We knew that he wasn’t a bad guy! Of course we did! He thought he could act like a villain, saying things like “I just ripped you guys off” or “Watch out, losers! Rich guy walking,” but we knew better. Obviously, he wasn’t a bad person. He rescued us over and over, and made us all happy...so why did he ignore his own needs? Why?

We were fine. It didn’t matter how many clothes we bought from him, or how much of his delicious food we ate. We didn’t mind paying him for it. We could spend the money we earned in the dungeons as we leveled up. It was an investment for us as adventurers, because leveling up helped us make more money. So, really, we were fi—spending way too much?!

(EXAMINATION OF ACCOUNTS OMITTED.)

Haruka-kun had hardly leveled up, and still hadn’t registered as an adventurer with the guild. After all his risky battles, he finally reached level 20.

Now he could register if he wanted, but he still couldn’t form a party, so he couldn’t accept any requests. Technically, he didn’t even have a permit to enter dungeons yet.

He didn’t have a single cent left of his massive profits from defeating monsters in the dungeons and the forests. And hardly any results in terms of leveling up, either.

He continued to clearcut the monster forest for the sake of the frontier. He just happened to collect all the valuable mushrooms of the forest when he did this. But soon, there would be nothing left and still no savings.

“Why doesn’t he accept our help?”

“Oh, he claims that he’s worried about getting the ‘Sugar Baby’ title?”

“...He might actually get that one!”

As a whole, we girls didn’t have a concrete objective. The only reason we faced danger in the dungeons and continued to level up was simply to make more money and become even stronger. We wanted to be able to protect Haruka-kun and the others.

That’s all we wanted: to get stronger, make money, and protect each other. No different from when we stayed in the cave. We didn’t care if Haruka-kun got the Sugar Baby title; we still wanted to protect him. We wanted to be able to repay him for everything.

But we still had a long way to go. If we really wanted to protect him, we needed to transcend level 100.

Even that didn’t compare to how long it would take before the entire duchy was wealthy. The duke and his family worked as hard as they could to achieve that dream. They didn’t want Haruka-kun to shoulder any more burdens, yet... no one could keep up with him. Nothing could compete with Haruka kun’s speed, his massive budgets, or his ever-expanding production capacity.

“Hmm, a way to make him sleep,” Vice Rep B said. “Should I whack him on the back of his head?”

“Knock him out?!”

The entire government and economy of the duchy couldn’t keep up with his cottage industries and mass spending. He left them in the dust, whether he meant to or not.

“Oda-kun said that Haruka-kun is basically a one-man nation.”

“Indeed,” said the Book Club President, “his military power, production capacity, and economic activity is way beyond that of any individual.”

“The nerds don’t seem concerned at all by that!”

“They spent a bunch of time building a boat. I wonder what they’re up to.”

“Kakizaki-kun’s group spent their whole day off grinding for experience, didn’t they?”

“You can’t try to catch up with Haruka-kun,” Kakizaki-kun had told me. “You gotta dive straight for the knees and tackle him. Make him trip.”

“Guess they really can’t catch up with Haruka-kun.”

“They said leveling up isn’t making a difference.”

Some of the girls were trying to learn how to craft using magic and alchemy, but the best they’d managed so far was a handkerchief. Mass production was little more than wishful thinking at this point. Even so, there was a textile workshop, or maybe I should say factory, in this very inn. A certain someone went ahead and kickstarted an industrial revolution!

“Having a combat job makes it harder, doesn’t it?”

“With practice, we should be able to overcome the crafting penalties.”

“Let’s just give it our best!”

“Yeah!”

We wanted to help Haruka-kun, so we practiced cooking and sewing...but I doubted we could ever possibly help a Grand Sorcerer with a tentacle-powered factory.

Haruka-kun and the general store lady made for a dangerous combination. They were far too much alike. The duke told us this story:

Long ago, there lived a sickly girl in Omui. With her weak constitution and poor family, she spent most of her days confined to bed.

But a group of adventurers brought her mushrooms that saved her life. Her family couldn’t afford to buy those mushrooms at any price, but those adventurers gave her the mushrooms in exchange for a promise—that she could pay them back when she could.

The girl convalesced and did everything she could to make sure she could pay her debt. Despite the pain she was in, she trained her frail body and sought out knowledge like she was possessed. She became an adventurer, saying that she would pay her debt forward and save others in turn.

The girl joined the party of adventurers who had saved her, and quickly distinguished herself. She risked her life to gather mushrooms in the monster forest, and gave them to the needy.

One day, every single member of her party died. She was the lone survivor.

Another party of adventurers found her at the edge of the forest and rescued her. She was unconscious, on the verge of death.

In order to save the girl's life, the adventurers went to all the people who had received mushrooms from her in the past. They gathered up what mushrooms they still had and gave them to her.

The girl survived, and eventually woke.

But by that point, all of the people who brought her those mushrooms had died. The townsfolk had used the few remaining mushrooms in their possession to save her life.

Her body never fully recovered. Enduring endless agonies, she trained her body until she could walk again, and immediately began a dangerous merchant venture as if she were possessed.

The girl sold all of her equipment to scrape together enough money to open a small shop, and began selling. Despite her injuries, she began to train to go into the forest again. Though all her friends tried to stop her, she gathered her equipment and made her preparations.

By that time, she wasn't a young girl anymore.

She couldn't stand that though she had been saved so many times, she had yet to save anyone else. She couldn't forgive herself.

One day, a black-haired boy came to her shop. A boy with a bag full of mushrooms.

He had more mushrooms with him than she had ever seen in her life. She spent all of her wealth to buy those mushrooms—enough mushrooms to save every last person in the realm.

The boy said, "If you give these away, that's it. But if you sell them for a profit, I can grant you a hundredfold more mushrooms."

The boy did not lie. As long as she gave him her profits, he returned with more mushrooms. No matter how much she sold, there were always more mushrooms.

The girl, now a woman, sold her equipment one last time. She had no need for it.

Finally able to help others, finally able to repay those old debts, she was free from her obligation. To this day, she works herself half to death in order to help the poor.

She always tells them with a smile, “You can pay me back later.”

That woman still lives here, running the general store.

...That’s why they were such a dangerous combination. They were too similar.

Neither of them could stand not being able to help others. They weren’t satisfied if even one person wasn’t smiling.

The proprietress was likely destitute. I didn’t need to ask her to know. She ran the largest trading operation on the frontier, but she lived like a pauper. After all, she kept a tab open with Haruka-kun to order food every single day.

And as for the duke, his behavior was just as suspicious. Though he was a duke, he always acted with the utmost humility. He was the sort of person to say things like “I swear it, even should it cost me my life” and “I shall repay this gracious act even if it is the last thing I do,” and actually mean them. Past dukes from his noble lineage had tended to die fighting monsters...I realized that he was also too much like Haruka-kun.

But that was why the people who served Duke Omui would never abandon him, and why everyone in town stopped to talk to the general store lady on the street.

That was why we had to get stronger. We had to protect Haruka-kun, to stay by his side. He would continue to spoil us, but we would stick by his side no matter what. And eventually, we would surpass him.

When that day came, we could finally protect him and support him.

We made this promise to Angelica-san. She also swore to protect him.

So today, we went to a dungeon, made money, bought clothes from Haruka-kun, and had him cook us some delicious food. We would press forward until the day came when Haruka-kun could become a full-time househusband.

If we could become strong enough to protect him, Haruka-kun wouldn't need to fight anymore.

Until then, we accumulated more and more debt. We worried that if our debt grew too large, he would use Servitude on us. Every night, the girls checked to make sure it hadn't showed up in our stats.

Still, I couldn't deny that I was a little jealous. Angelica and Slimey seemed so happy all the time.

We needed to snap out of our childish daydream of getting spoiled by Haruka-kun all the time, and actually get stronger. That was the real dream.

DAY 54

EVENING

I don't know who it is, but there appears to be a legitimate magic user in here.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

THE LOWEST FLOOR of the dungeon carried the risk of death. I had to make that clear during the dinner meeting—they needed to understand the terror I felt!

“Miss Armor Rep nearly killed me! She used that morning star! I kept running away, dodging and teleporting all over the place. The dungeon king happened to be nearby and it got caught in the crossfire! Miss Armor Rep wielding a morning star dealt incredible collateral damage!”

For some reason I was met with a barrage of glares.

“Huh? So while you two bickered, the dungeon king happened to walk by and get tangled up in your quarrel?”

“Are you surprised that the dungeon king happened to be nearby? It's supposed be on that floor! That's not a coincidence!”

“No, I'm telling you, the boss just walked right into the pointy end of a morning star! Then, it was killed, y'know? I didn't get a chance to use Appraisal before it turned into a spellstone.”

Traditionally, the morning star symbolized the dawn, but in this case, it only meant lights out. Why were they still glaring at me?

“I'm pretty concerned that your lover's spat was so deadly that it killed a dungeon king in an instant.”

“He said it tragically perished—that means he killed it!”

“That's, like, the whole point of entering a dungeon! Don't tell me you two

went in just to have an argument.”

I wasn’t sure why, but the severity of these flat looks felt apocalyptic.

“Well, I *did* put my life on the line fighting, didn’t I? I had to use instantaneous movement to get out of the way of a spiked ball hurtling towards me! It wasn’t easy! That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it! And since I’m sticking to it, it’s exactly what happened. I’m not kidding.”

They should have understood that Teleport was a risky skill to use. If I made one wrong move, I could’ve died. I was going to get scolded twice over for this!

“You’re telling us that there was a dungeon king on the 70th floor, but it tragically perished in an unfortunate accident, and you’re not sure why?” the Class Rep asked.

“That’s exactly what you said.”

“You two went from the 50th to the 70th floor in one day and happened to kill the final boss? Please help me understand, you’re saying the dungeon died because a stupid couple kept playing with a spiky metal ball?”

“I can’t believe this happened again.”

“Well, they did do what they were supposed to do.”

“I can see it now: the dungeon king probably said something along the lines of ‘Prepare to die, puny humans,’ and then he died, unprepared. This is the most likely scenario, no?”

“It didn’t even get to introduce itself,” said the Tiny Animal, with tears welling up.

We cleared a dungeon of seventy floors, defeating one dungeon king and two mid-bosses, in addition to the monsters that lurked on each floor. If the monsters flooded out of the dungeon, it would have wrecked the frontier before the monster threat could be quelled.

Hordes of monsters emerged from the forest on occasion, but those were small-scale events. The one led by the orc king was an unprecedented disaster. They didn’t need to know that there once was a goblin emperor in the deepest reaches of that forest.

A dungeon overflow, in comparison, was an exceedingly rare event. When they happened, they could wipe entire regions off the map. The Ultimate Dungeon would have destroyed the entire continent if it overflowed. The pair of dungeon rulers beside me nodded and jiggled along, as if they were innocent in all this—I made a mental note not to remind anyone of their former professions.

“I’ve got no clue what kind of boss it was, but it dropped a ‘Rare Treant Staff: MP +30%. Elemental Affinity bonus (medium). Magic Control bonus.’ It’s an item for spellcasters. Y’know, the ones with magic staves and pointy hats? This monster seemed to have some common sense; it probably wanted to cast spells instead of swinging its magic staff around like a hammer, y’know?”

For a level 70 item drop, the Rare Treant Staff was decent, though it wasn’t as good as my Elder Ent Staff.

“Ah, a spellcaster didn’t survive getting smacked with a morning star, even at level 70!”

“She wasn’t even trying to hit the boss; she was aiming for Haruka-kun.”

“And she’s awful at whistling?!”

“Phweeee!”

This staff was going to make me rich. The Elder Ent Staff was far superior, but this would sell for so much just because it was loot dropped by a final boss. Why were they all focused on Angelica-san? Did she forget how to talk?

With the way she swung around that spiked ball, even a final boss built like a tank wouldn’t have survived. Incidentally, I didn’t stand a chance, either. *Not tonight or any other night!*

“Now then, gather around, ye hapless rubes; come hither, teenage riffraff! Who wants some pudding? Consider this an act of noblesse oblige from a temporarily embarrassed millionaire, a one-time blessing, my dear friends, because the second pudding cup goes for a thousand ele. It’s a secret, but if you buy extra pudding, I’ll get rich! So please do.”

I had made 180 servings of pudding just to be on the safe side, and made ten giga-puddings for Slimey, who wiggled just like a pudding. *He’s so cute!*

“Pudding!”

“We’re not a mass of hapless rubes, we have names!”

“When will you remember them?!”

Jiggle jiggle!

If I wasn’t mistaken, Slimey was hitting it off with his first giga-pudding. They connected on a deeper level than I ever imagined.

“Slimey, are you turning yellow with a caramelized top layer? Did you absorb the doppelganger’s Mimesis skill?”

Wiggle wiggle!

I watched two giant puddings jiggling back and forth beside each other.

“I don’t think there’s any reason to mimic a giga-pudding, though. The girls might try to eat you, y’know? The mean girls, especially. They bite!”

Jiggle jiggle?!

The girls loved the pudding. Though the eggs and milk were of dubious origins, their mixture produced a pudding that charmed them all. They were already asking for thirds!

“This is better than the pudding back on Earth!”

“It’s so rich and decadent! The ingredients from another world produce such a harmonious blend!”

“It’s rich, but not heavy.”

“Pudding-licious!” the Stalker Girl shouted.

“Mmm, it’s a delight on the tongue,” Vice Rep B said, “and it jiggles with ever so much charm...”

Jiggle jiggle!

I had made so much money. *Thank you, noblesse oblige.* Sweets had insanely high profit margins, almost as high as their calorie count. Everyone knew that, and they were just going to make a fuss about burning all those calories off later.

“Thanks for the food!”

“Thanks!”

“Hey, get the hell out of my way!”

“If you don’t get out of this line, I’ll crush you!”

“Poor pudding!”

Jiggle jiggle.

After ruthlessly profiteering with puddings, I arranged an auction to scam them of the rest of their money.

“*More* new products?!”

“Look at those effects!”

“Wow!”

Everyone fought for their place in line to apply for loans from the Class Rep. But when I tried to join the line, they all yelled at me. *This is discrimination!*

As expected, Shield Girl had the winning bid on the Morning Star of Altered Weight. She was becoming a weapons collector or something. The girls also found some items in the dungeon, and they put those in the auction. Whenever they got new gear, they put their old equipment straight into the auction as well. There were thirty people out there scavenging dungeons every day and still no one had encountered a Pheromone Ring or anything like it. Why was that?

Naturally, all the items I brought sold. The estoc fetched a high price. However, I was most glad to get the morning star out of Miss Armor Rep’s hands. That thing was dangerous. Why was Miss Armor Rep so good at using it even though she was a Trueblade? I was relieved that the Shield Girl bought it.

Who would’ve thought that having lewd thoughts in a dungeon would be so dangerous? If you got rid of a high school boy’s horny imagination, the only thing left would be a student handbook. Thinking about sexy stuff in a dungeon was *definitely* safer than that spiked metal ball! That was the one ultimate weapon that I couldn’t let her have at any cost!

After Slimey and I finished bathing, I went straight to crafting. I would make anklet plans tonight, starting with one for Miss Armor Rep! I had to hurry; this would be the ultimate weapon for tonight's rematch!

"The styling is the most important, but I want it to still be useful. Seems like a spellstone anklet would make for a safe compromise."

I wanted to make a design that accentuated her lovely ankles, so I began to construct prototypes.

"Hmmm, a chain would be practical, but considering the effects, maybe a spiral anklet would work best? Maybe I can make different versions: casual designs and dungeoneering designs? I need at least one design as a late-night reward for all my hard work, you know? I definitely need some of that late-night reward tonight!"

Increasing the variety too much would only summon a greater maelstrom of orders. My side job was like a dinghy caught in an ocean storm, a storm so massive that people just assumed the boat went under.

"The catalog of orders from the general store is as thick as an encyclopedia at this point. How did she manage to write this many orders in a single day? It'll take another day just to read them all! By the time I'm finished reading, it'll be too late to work on anything! Of course, the first page is dedicated to mushroom skewers! She even marked it as an urgent order! Did she make a custom stamp just for lunch orders? If she has time for that, she should try working instead!"

I quickly lined up the prototypes. To start, I made a hundred different styles of anklets! The one with a chime attached looked nice, but the one with three looked just as good. I also liked the chain anklet and the one with a T-strap. These all turned out great!

"Tsk, every time I make one, I imagine a pair of sexy legs wearing it, so shapely and tempting!"

It would've been even easier to imagine new designs after Miss Armor Rep tried them on, but I couldn't possibly concentrate on work if she did that. I'd

become too fixated on trying hard to do something else. Something incredible.
These anklets are wonderful!

Jiggle jiggle!

“Oops, sorry, Slimey. Was I talking out loud? When did I start talking? Was it ‘licking all over,’ or when I said ‘Yeah, just like that?’ Oh no, please don’t tell me that I actually said, ‘You love it when I...’ out loud?!”

Yeah, that was definitely not allowed.

DAY 54

EVENING

It's pretty tough on a teenage boy to have to imagine the girls' bath meeting every single day, y'know?

INTERLUDE: THE WHITE LOSER INN

BACK GARDEN

ILLUMINATED BY THE FAINT LIGHT of the night sky, a figure clad in platinum armor shone against the encroaching darkness. In the total stillness, she silently regarded her surroundings. We had her outflanked, all the blind spots covered. Yet it wasn't enough. As soon as our formation broke, she defeated us.

"Six strikes! Wahhh!"

"Six sword style! Hiyaaaah!"

"An opening! Wait, never mind!"

"Flame Jail—wait, what?"

"Dodge this, and th—" This last battle cry was interrupted by the sound of a jiggle.

What was that? Was Slimey hiding among us? It sounded like two things jiggling, though.

One of the nerds roared, "Ora ora ora, wait, oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!"

"Oh yeah?! See if you can survive my most powerful—huh, you did?!" The athlete's words were interrupted by a thump, and he let out a plaintive "Guh!"

"Superspeed! Wait, she's still faster!"

The boys were also trying their best, but...they needed to learn how to work together. They sent an endless stream of attacks at her, but not a single one of

them landed.

Now it was my turn! Ground-Shrink—huh?

“Aaaaaaaaagh!”

Five losses in a row. She cleaned our clocks. With each passing day it took a little longer, but that was our only measure of improvement. She was still far beyond our reach.

“All right, that’s enough for today. Let’s go wash off, okay?”

“Agreed! I’m exhausted!”

The magic users had also exhausted their MP. Angelica wiped the floor with us. Even fighting as a group, we couldn’t keep up, and our individual abilities were useless, too.

We couldn’t maintain our coordination under the relentless barrage of attacks. Was there something wrong with our strategy? We couldn’t win by playing defense, but when we tried to charge in, nothing worked.

“She’s just trying to provoke us, isn’t she?”

“Yes, and we completely fell for her trap.”

“And I was feeling so good about myself today.”

“She was literally messing with you.”

“Yup.”

It sucked to lose, but it was good for us. Even sacrificing some of our defenses, we couldn’t make up for it through offense. Our formation simply scattered too easily. Our strength lost to her speed.

“Angelica-san, what did we do wrong? Why did we fall apart?”

“Jumping in...get in each...other’s way. Hesitate...after attacks. Retreat...faster. Shimazaki’s group...did great.”

Angelica-san explained with a series of gestures. Ah, she waited for the moment when we swapped positions. Aside from Shimazaki-san’s group, we all

slowed down when we repositioned.

“Attacks. Qu-quantity...better than strength.”

“Really?!”

Our coordinated attacks had an uneven rhythm. Angelica-san knocked us out one by one when there was a pause. If we couldn't get in enough attacks, we were done for.

We didn't have enough people or attacks, so we couldn't hold out against her overwhelming speed. We needed some sort of skill or weapon to compensate. She targeted two groups in particular—Oda-kun's group and the book club.

Those teams were the connective tissue of our formations, the mid-guard. The book club, in particular, was in charge of running interference, and if we put them on the front lines, there would be no one to slow Angelica down. We hesitated too much.

Oda-kun's group excelled at weaving attacks together into perfect combos, but Angelica targeted them in the middle of such a combo. In an instant, she attacked and interrupted their attacks.

“We still have a gap in our combo?!”

“I thought it was perfect!”

“When she affects our timing even a little bit, it results in a misfire.”

“So that's how she obliterates us!”

“This is impossible,” the nerds complained.

We went inside, those of us who were still conscious carrying those who weren't. Kakizaki-kun's team were the only ones smiling after they took a beating. Was that the kind of thing they were into?

“We need a bigger weapon, dude,” Kakizaki-kun said.

“But bro, in order to pull off our skills, we need to pump more iron!”

“She's too strong!”

Honestly, they were probably desperate for an opponent who was better than them. They craved a challenge. *I hope that's what they crave!* I was just

making a joke, right?

“I can understand our attacks not working, but how did she dodge everything?”

“She didn’t just dodge. She counterattacked at the same time.”

“That’s way worse than just blocking!”

“She was totally baiting us!”

Vice Rep C had tried to whirl into the fray with her two throwing axes and dual short daggers, but it only ended in disappointment. She got knocked out as if Angelica predicted her every move.

“Step in, attack, don’t...falter,” Angelica said, “Everyone...at the same time.”

We needed to learn how to fight without relying on our skills, the way that Haruka-kun and Angelica did.

Kakizaki-kun’s group at least understood the basics, but they still fell back on using their weapon techniques in a pinch. Meanwhile, Oda-kun’s group exclusively relied on their skills and techniques, but they put no thought into how they fought. *It’s a pretty magnificent example of giving up.*

The sports girls did an impressive job of keeping their attack and defense up, but they were too slow to retreat. That was probably where our timing went wrong. To make it work, either the student council would have to advance early or Shimazaki-san’s group would have to swap with others.

But that put Shield Girl in a precarious position. Should I also get a shield? I wondered if I could get a skill to use shields.

When Oda-kun’s group fought, they sent their Guardian to create defensive Barriers, then the group launched their counterattack. But weaker weapon techniques had no effect on Angelica, and they grew increasingly frustrated that she struck whenever they tried to use one of their more serious skills. Nevertheless, they were trying to come up with attack chains that wouldn’t have any openings for Angelica to exploit.

“See? The Quad Barrier doesn’t last,” said the Guardian. “Can we add two more layers?”

“But even if we did, she could still break through.”

“This battle can’t be decided based on speed! We’ll never win!”

“Good work, everyone!”

We dispersed, the girls heading to the baths. We needed to discuss strategy during our girls-only meeting. The guys were all so specialized that it was up to the girls to form a strategy that encompassed them all. The only all-arounders we had were the student council and Shimazaki-san’s enslaved group.

And, according to Angelica, Shimazaki-san’s group was the only one with a passing grade. The rest of us needed to improve or change our strategy.

“I can go to the front,” I suggested.

“Who would give commands, then?”

“Yeah, you’re our president!”

“I don’t think most class presidents are expected to command battles! Besides, school doesn’t even exist anymore!”

“It’s true that we don’t have a proper chain of command.”

“We can’t split up. That’ll just cause confusion!”

“Definitely!”

We talked it over in the bath. We shared ways to improve our fighting, new strategies for the battle, and methods for better cooperation. All this so that we could become stronger and fulfill our reason for being here.

We decided on a new formation and worked out how all the different teams would work together. Each new tactic that we learned, every approach we came up with, built on a bedrock of functioning strategy.

Eventually, the topic drifted to the more usual subject of girls’ talk: “He did what?!”

“Five! Five rounds! And then on top of that—”

“He did that with his teeth?!”

We had to stop! At this rate, there would be no survivors; a third of the girls had already sunk beneath the waters! We needed to retreat to our rooms!

We didn't have enough MP to practice Magic Manipulation, and we would drown before we could recover! *I mean, of course we had to ask her about it, but still.* With the combination of her gestures and expressions it felt a little too vivid. Her descriptions, genuine and awkward as they were, conveyed her feelings perfectly. She talked about it like it was something wild and terrifying, how she felt like she would lose her mind, yet she did so with an irrepressible smile. *The lady doth protest too much, as they say.*

The real problem was that when she got too involved in the telling, her expression became dreamy and distant, and the descriptions became far more detailed.

As soon as she finished talking, she got dressed and ran off to his room. Everyone else collapsed, exhausted. She was a sex goddess!

Haruka-kun had made something truly terrifying for such a deity—a fishnet bodystocking! *There's no way I'll buy that! No way!*

DAY ?

OMUI



INTERLUDE: THE DUKE'S PALACE

WHAT IN THE WORLD was happening in the kingdom? They refused to let go of my duchy, and it was unclear whether they even understood the messages I had sent. Now that Nallogi, which had served as Omui's warden, had fallen, the situation was changing rapidly.

"Any news from the kingdom?"

"No, my lord."

"Any official messengers we send are attacked and forced to retreat."

"Hmph. Perhaps we should challenge the Royal Guard directly and cut through their forces."

"How would an act of aggression aid our cause, sire? They may be trying to provoke us."

After cutting ourselves off from the rest of the kingdom, we needed to travel as far as Nallogi to gather information... Why did the royal family sever all contact? Why would they not even acknowledge our envoys?

"Just because we have been blessed with an era of prosperity does not change the danger of our circumstances. Most likely, the kingdom already marches on us."

"Impossible! They wouldn't do that without word!"

If only we could establish contact with the eastern houses, we could grasp the truth of this situation. Negotiations had fallen apart, and the other duchies ignored our inquiries in the name of self-protection. This could not continue; that wasn't an option.

“We must consider the possibility that the king intends to keep us in the dark.”

I could not believe that the kingdom would go to such lengths. The frontier only ever had to fend off the threat of monsters, and the thought of the kingdom and the other noble houses attacking us was unthinkable. If the kingdom had become so corrupt, then I, in my capacity as the duke of the frontier, would choose my people over the kingdom. Indeed, for I could never betray our greatest benefactor in any case.

“The Shino clan delivered an intelligence report...this, how can this be?”

“Knowing as little as we do, we must assume the worst. Ignoring the movements of the military is no longer an option.”

I never would have imagined that the 1st Brigade would advance upon the frontier, much less the 2nd Brigade, given their focus on defense.

“If it’s only the 3rd Brigade, surely we can let them be?”

“We must be careful to not underestimate them, my lord. The scions of the other noble houses gather in mass.”

The 3rd Brigade—known as the Royal Guard—was little more than a symbolic post for the children of nobles. As such, it was hard to credit reports that they were involved in matters of national security. Yet I could not ignore that the largest armies of the kingdom were on the move.

“What is the king planning?”

DAY 55

MORNING

Middle-aged men who lost their jobs are treated just as poorly in this world, too.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

I GOT A SUMMONS. I was just going to tag along with some random party today, and I wouldn't get to do anything, anyway.

All the other groups were around the 30th floor of their dungeons, so they weren't in any real danger. There was nothing for me to do on those levels, so I definitely didn't need to be there. On the other hand, maybe they were planning to collect all the spellstones and treasures for themselves! And they'd definitely use their newfound wealth to bully this high school boy with humongous orders! These big spenders were using their orders as a form of abuse! Did they find out how much I had been overcharging?

The impoverished high school girls were on the verge of striking it rich, but not for long. Before the night was through, I would bankrupt them all!

"Good thing I finished mass-producing anklets last night. Time to oppress the masses and take all their money!"

Jiggle jiggle!

I traveled swiftly to the pseudo-dungeon with my two companions. Though I had suggested that the dungeon dropout duo go with my classmates just in case, they wanted to stick with me.

"I was just here the day before yesterday to buy groceries from the towns on the other side. What's the problem?"

By now, they should've been sold out of all goods. That being the case, I wondered why Meridad had decided to meet me here.

I wasn't concerned about the old man seeing my travel companions, as I simply pretended that I had enslaved a totally normal slime and skeleton. I didn't want to cause a scene.

Even so, Miss Armor Rep sometimes went out in casual clothes on her days off, so there was a chance that someone saw her around town and noticed that she wasn't a skeleton anymore. Was there a census form I needed to fill out in case my skeleton thrall turned into a mysterious sort of human?

"Come to think of it, I haven't registered with any official organization, so I wouldn't need to update anyone's info! Yes, I'm in the clear! Didn't break any rules!"

Wiggle wiggle.

I'd noticed that I tended to get favorable treatment, anyway. Adventurers didn't have to pay taxes because the guild withheld the taxes from any spellstone trading. I wasn't an adventurer, but I received a permit that declared me tax-exempt. The Adventurers' Guild kept ten percent of all spellstone sales, but the money I made from the general store and the armory wasn't taxed. Since Miss Armor Rep was technically my slave, she didn't need to pay any taxes either.

"Whoa, hang on...does this mean that the mean girls are also tax-exempt? They're so mean, y'know? They'll even bite!"

Jiggle jiggle.

If Miss Armor Rep was to get registered with the local government, she could just claim to have been human all along, after all. Besides, I felt like someone would've yelled at me if I showed up in town and said, "This jiggly one is a dungeon king, and the voluptuous one is a dungeon emperor." *Yeah, I don't need to tell anyone that.*

The gatekeepers never said anything, either. In fact, they even pet Slimey a bit, so I had nothing to worry about. I didn't do anything wrong. *If anyone says anything, I can just blame the gatekeepers!*

"Haruka-kun, I apologize for making you come all the way here. I must say this before we continue. My name is Meropapa Sim Omui, the Duke of Omui. It is

not Mr. Meridad or anything of the sort. Do you understand? You may call me Meropapa if you wish, but please try to remember that much at least. Also, the name of the city where you currently reside is Omui. We have plenty of signs everywhere. I even ordered larger ones. Did you see them?”

I couldn’t believe I had to hang out with Mr. Meridad. Yet another geezer I had to endure. *Isn’t the ratio of middle-aged men to everyone else in this world terrifying?* I was sure that if I took a census, the population would be eighty percent old men. This had to be the case, because four out of every five people I met was a middle-aged man. Was there some problem with the birth rate or aging in this society? Did they all spawn from the same location?!

There was probably some sort of Graybeard King relaxing on the lowest floor of a dungeon somewhere. I couldn’t expect any decent loot, though. It’d turn out to be something like a Ring of Old Man Stank or something. I couldn’t blame my sex appeal if it decided to hightail it out of here and never be seen again!

“Pardon me, Haruka-kun, are you listening? It is I, Meropapa Sim Omui!”

“Uhhh, right. So, you called me to a meeting, so I came. Do you want me to destroy your neighbors? Should I just take care of the whole kingdom for you? If it involves destroying old men, sign me up. How do you want them dealt with? I can burn them; I’m pretty sure I can pulverize them. Don’t ask me to disintegrate their clothes, though. I’m not into that.”

A den of old men was far more terrifying than any dungeon. No matter how dangerous the Ultimate Dungeon was, the dungeon emperor was a beautiful girl, which made it worth my time. The only way of dealing with a hive of middle-aged men was to burn it to the ground and salt the earth! *Like the old proverb, “Let sleeping old dudes die.”*

“If you would please refrain from tormenting the middle-aged men, I would appreciate it. Even my own soldiers fear you. Additionally, I would ask you to stop staring at me when you wax poetic about burning old men, and crushing them into a fine powder. We’re not here to destroy our neighbor, either. Please don’t casually destroy the entire kingdom.”

Apparently, I was wrong. So why did he call me out here, then?

The Class Rep always insisted that the duke of the frontier was just trying to

thank me and express his gratitude to the savior of his city, whoever that was. Was that why he rambled so much whenever I ran into him? Even now, he was waving his hand in my face and calling out, “Hey, Haruka-kun!” Did he just lose his job? *Downsizing? How sad.*

So was he a comrade in unemployment, now? No, I didn’t need or want any old man comrades. Only moments ago, I was planning to destroy them!

“Welcome, and apologies for calling you here so suddenly,” said an attendant. “Please come this way.” Looked like the attendant hadn’t gotten laid off. He was the only person I’d seen doing any actual work around here.

“What? I believe I was the one who called Haruka-kun,” Meridad said. “You won’t just leave your liege behind, will you? If my attendants saw this, they would weep, so please, stop! Aren’t you one of my attendants as well?!”

Yeah, that old man was totally unemployed. Even his former attendant ignored him. This world was full of monsters, but that seemed quaint compared to this fraught social relationship.

After all, beating up monsters was far more wholesome.

“If you want to keep things wholesome, don’t ban murder scenes in manga and videogames. Ban them in dramas first. Imagine a detective series where a maid prevented a murder instead of merely becoming a witness! Doesn’t that sound grand? Maids are the best.”

Jiggle jiggle.

“Please have a seat.”

“And where am I to sit? I am your lord!”

They didn’t even provide a seat for him after he lost his job. He didn’t even get a little spot by the window. Mr. Meridad needed to learn some sort of trade; maybe he could take over some side jobs.

Apparently, the envoy of the Kingdom had gone to the neighboring domain to gather adventurers from across the realm in an attempt to breach the pseudo-dungeon without sitting down at the negotiating table.

“Here is all the information that we have.”

As long as we had the pseudo-dungeon, any negotiations would be overwhelmingly in our favor. At this rate, the kingdom would never be able to get the conditions they wanted out of a deal. However, if they could just get rid of the pseudo-dungeon, they could use their military might to put pressure on the frontier. The kingdom needed to conquer the pseudo-dungeon before they could launch an invasion.

“The Adventurers’ Guild from the kingdom has assembled elite soldiers. They’re serious about this.”

A conventional army was ill-suited to fighting in a dungeon. A large force that had to navigate a cramped labyrinth was easy pickings. Adventurers could improvise, and thus had a much easier time in dungeons.

The army specialized in fighting people, and the adventurers specialized in fighting monsters, after all. They had totally different skillsets.

Why did I, a person with no skillset at all, get thrown straight to the lowest floor of the Ultimate Dungeon? My first dungeon battle was the final boss fight!

“You’re too soft with your soldiers. Just throw them down a hole! Well, I don’t think most soldiers could climb back up after falling down a hundred-story hole. Still, it’s totally unfair that I was the only one who had to learn like that. It’s no great loss, since they’re middle-aged men. So just keep tossing them in a pit until the Graybeard King gets crushed!”

Well, my dungeon here was fake, so it didn’t have multiple floors, or a Graybeard King, for that matter. I definitely didn’t want to enslave the Graybeard King.

“Pardon me, but are you listening? I know that you never do, but could you at least try to remember my name. Could you at least give me somewhere to sit? Why is everyone sitting except for your duke? I won’t leave any time soon, so could you bring me a chair? It’s a little depressing to be the only one standing up!”

High-ranking adventurers and soldiers from throughout the kingdom were gathered on the Omui side of the pseudo-dungeon.

“Look, it’s faster to burn than to defend,” I said. “Especially if you’re talking

about geezers.”

“We’re talking about negotiations! Not a firebombing!”

I was confident that scouring the land with fire was the most efficient solution to their problem, but I was apparently not allowed! *These old men need to stop glaring at me before I burn their eyes out.* No one wanted that!

“Well, they’re certainly not going to overcome the pseudo-dungeon,” I said. “It’s not a dungeon, so they can’t kill it. Neither adventurers nor soldiers can get through it, y’know?”

The aftermath would be incredibly graphic. I had no interest in seeing a bunch of old man nudity. Burning still sounded like the most tempting strategy.

“But they’re hand-picked, the cream of the crop.”

Not a single civilian remained in the city across the pass. I couldn’t be sure until I got my report from Stalker Girl’s clan, but the city seemed to lack even the most basic essentials. All the shops had closed, and the whole city was on the precipice of ruin. I thoroughly cleaned out whatever stock remained, after all. It was as good as uninhabitable for some time now.

The Stalker Girl’s clan smuggled people into the frontier, bought up all the goods from both the city and the neighboring towns, and even obstructed long-distance trade. The bureaucrats and soldiers had all fled. It was no longer a city.

“I’m telling you, no one will get through.”

The kingdom was on the losing side of a war of attrition. Having no other recourse, they decided to challenge the pseudo-dungeon for the first time. They were really going to go in there without any planning. I almost felt sorry for them—I’d gone more than a little overboard with those traps.

If I’d razed the neighboring city, attacked the duke and killed the soldiers, I would’ve broken so many laws, and that would’ve made protecting the domain more difficult.

So, I did none of those things! There weren’t any laws against destabilizing the economy, after all. It caused the residents some difficulty, but I managed to destroy the city without killing its duke or any of its soldiers.

“To demand negotiations when we have such an overwhelming advantage may be selfish, but we must consider this matter from the kingdom’s perspective. Will the adventurers survive in that dungeon?”

Well, it was all a matter of time anyway. Destroying that city was easy. All their income was based on tariffs on the frontier’s spellstone trade. When an economy began its spiral toward death, the people who felt it most were the poorest and most in need. To solve this problem, we moved those people to the frontier, solving the frontier’s labor shortage at the same time.

“The whole point is that they can get out alive and try to challenge it all over again, but they’re not even trying to learn how my traps work! Do you have any idea how much effort I put into them?! They keep getting stuck in the same damn spot!”

Jiggle jiggle?!

Even high-ranking adventurers couldn’t make it through, especially since none of those idiots could think!

Just to be sure, I added another false exit. Any adventurer who went through it would fall down a chute where a slide would deposit them back at the entrance to the dungeon. A few rounds of that would break their hearts long before they broke mine! With their spirits crushed, they might give up on adventuring and become unemployed!

“You guys have no idea how heartbreaking being called a NEET is,” I said. “It’s heartbreak overdrive over here. They will learn my pain, I’ll make sure of it. I even waxed the slide again, so it’s extremely slick!”

After I waxed it, Miss Armor Rep and Slimey liked riding the slide so much that they did it sixteen times. We ended up staying out pretty late.

I was surprised to hear an attendant shout, “You’re right! He’s not listening to a word we’re saying!”

DAY 55

MORNING

You gotta put in the work after understanding the fantasy world gestures.

INTERLUDE: THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON

I HAD MY ORDERS: destroy the dungeon that blocks the way to the frontier. Then, deliver an ultimatum to the duke. The kingdom was running out of time.

But the kingdom underestimated the frontier and its ruler. If I couldn't start negotiations with this, the kingdom would collapse. I had to meet the duke, and in order to do that, I had to destroy this dungeon.

"Ready to go?"

"Yes, my lady!"

I led a group of dungeon experts—a core of A-rank adventurers leading the way with numerous B-rank adventurers filling out support and auxiliary roles—to investigate this mysterious dungeon. However, what awaited us was no fierce battle, no mere fight to the death. This was no laughing matter. At the kingdom's behest, I had summoned all the high-ranking adventurers that I could. They flocked to us when they saw the reward.

That was just how pressing this mission was. A job that would determine the survival of the kingdom. We could spare no expense in conquering this dungeon.

And yet, these cream of the crop elites—*stop it, I can't laugh!* They were trying their best to serve the kingdom and... *Pfft, ha ha ha ha ha!*

"Aaaaghhh!"

A narrow path spanned a deep chasm. Like the mountain pass itself, it twisted and turned at many points. No large army could pass through here. They would

simply get knocked out by the boulders launched from the walls of the chasm. It was my duty to destroy this dungeon and pass through to Omui. That was all.

One adventurer dodged the treacherous rocks, dancing nimbly forward, before slipping and falling into the pit.

Another leaped over the slick path and gripped a boulder overhead, which detached from the ceiling and fell with the adventurer.

Anyone who tried to rescue a comrade was pelted with stones the moment they stopped. If they didn't pay attention, stones from above would occasionally fall on their heads.

It had nothing to do with the skill of one's sword arm or the might of one's magic. The adventurers just slipped and fell, over and over. One adventurer buffed himself and took a running leap to the far precipice...and promptly crashed into some unseen mechanism, tumbling head over heels into the dark.

The rumble of running water echoed from the chasm below, so there was no real risk to the adventurers' lives. Their splashes were punctuated with agonized cries: "My equipment is melting! My clothes are melting!"

How many adventurers did I lose just trying to cross the narrow passage and deactivate the rock launcher? In the room beyond, giant spider monsters lay in wait on the ceiling. I gathered a group of spellcasters to strike the monsters down, only for the ceiling to collapse and bury our vanguard. No one sustained any serious injuries, but their equipment was damaged beyond repair, and they couldn't continue any further. Only then did I realize that the spider monsters were merely paintings. They weren't even real.

The passage continued from there. Trying to leap over an obvious pitfall, the adventurers smacked straight into a wall before falling back into the pit. What they had taken for the continuation of the passage was only a painting of a tunnel on the wall. Every last adventurer who attempted it fell in.

"What the hell is this?!"

"I've never encountered a dungeon like this before."

Our objective was to avoid fighting any of the golems in this place and cross the passageway, but simple corridors were far more terrifying than those

golems!

As if that was not terrifying enough, more than half of the remaining adventurers had lost their weapons, equipment, and even their clothes. These semi-nude adventurers could no longer be considered a credible fighting force.

We couldn't fight the dungeon king like this; it was impossible. Indeed, all the female adventurers fled the dungeon immediately after they lost their clothes. *Kind of a shame—ahem!* They were able to safely escape.

"Retreat is no longer an option, but if we continue, we risk utter defeat. Let the adventurers escape and we will remain to face the dungeon king ourselves. Take weapons and equipment from the youngest members of our crew and send them away," I commanded. "I don't want to waste lives."

"At once, my lady!"

Without weapons or armor, they wouldn't be accused of desertion, as they could no longer fight.

"Are you sure? That means..."

"As long as I am here, we have a chance. If I don't return, assume that our force was wiped out."

The kingdom faced destruction. The Duke of Omui would not forgive the kingdom, not after what the aristocratic families had done to the frontier for generations. This was only natural.

"I won't make it there even to apologize, eh?"

Those nobles deserved whatever happened to them. For generations, our kingdom commanded the frontier to die on our behalf. We should've helped them, but instead we bled them dry and made them suffer. Even were we to apologize, it would not be accepted, and rightly so.

However, those noble-born scum wouldn't risk anything for the greater good of the kingdom, even if that meant the realm would perish. The end of our kingdom was nigh.

"Shall we give it a shot?"

"Yes, my lady!"

I advanced with a small group, but we encountered no monsters, only traps. We hadn't even found any stairs leading to lower levels. It appeared to be a unique sort of dungeon made only of corridors. The dungeon king was likely somewhere further ahead. Only eight of us remained.

I was not vainglorious enough to believe that I could conquer this dungeon with so few adventurers. But if I didn't force my way through these traps to face the dungeon king at the center, I would never be able to look my fallen comrades in the eyes.

Now there were only five of us.

Despite advancing with the utmost caution, the soldier who opened the door vanished with a scream. The door handle was itself a trap. Unable to remove his hand from the door, the soldier screamed as the door dragged him into a pit below.

I was the last one standing.

But my luck had run out. My arms and legs were glued to the floor. There I was, kneeling on all fours and unable to move. I was trapped like a wild animal, unable to advance, to fight, to retreat, or even to stand. I awaited my grim fate.

I couldn't even draw my sword from its scabbard. I felt my armor begin to corrode and disintegrate.

Suddenly, the rocky wall shifted with a tremulous shudder. Countless stone humanoid figures pulled free from the walls—stone golems!

In my wretched circumstances, I couldn't fight them, and my death would have no glory, only humiliation. I was at least happy that I would not have to witness the fall of the kingdom.

The Stone Golems approached me, surrounded me, and...lifted the slab of floor I was attached to.

I gasped. I felt a floating sensation—I thought the stone golems would slam me into the rocky ground, but instead they carried me peacefully above their heads. They marched onward as the floor beneath me swayed in their grip. Was I to become a human sacrifice to the sinister dungeon king? Was I about to be eaten by monsters, without even a chance to fight back?

There was no point in trying to make any plans.

Swaying from side to side, the golems marched me down a long corridor. This had to have been some sort of ritual.

At the end of the tunnel, I saw a bright light. Our destination... The stone golems lifted me up into the light, still frozen in this humiliating posture.

For a moment, the light dazzled me. If I was going to die not by the stroke of a sword, but by the fangs of a beast, I at least wanted to go out with a furious glare—

I was outside.

I could see fortress walls in the distance, and an army that would put the forces of the kingdom to shame approached. Leading it was the Duke of Omui, who had come to be known as a legendary hero of the frontier. His people called him the Frontier King. His foes feared him as if he were a god of war. Known as a swordsman without equal, it was the living legend, Meropapa Sim Omui.

Everyone's gaze turned to me. I realized that I was half-naked...covered only with a few scraps of cloth, all that remained of my equipment. I was lifted high into the air with my hands and knees glued to a slab of rock...

“Waaaahhhhhh!”



DAY 55

EVENING

She's still upset even after I fed her treats and told her it's fine about a hundred times?

THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON EXIT

I HAD NEVER SEEN a glare like that before. Her eyes were like windows into an endless, dark abyss.

Those were eyes that understood the truth—that I wasn't the bad guy here! Of course, maybe I went a little overboard with the clothes dissolving thing, but that was the nerds' idea. *Blame them!* They wanted to add tentacles, too. Good thing those never got activated. When we realized that the victims would be old men nine times out of ten, we weakened the corrosive effect until it left victims only *half*-naked. It wasn't like she was totally exposed, only *almost* totally exposed. This was just barely allowable on late-night television programs.

Her eyes were dead inside. Maybe the stone golems were a little too enthusiastic with their lifting? Those eyes looked like all hope had been extinguished.

"Uhhh...are you okay? Well, you look so not okay that even the possibility of okay must seem like an absurd joke, but you're okay, right? Yeah. Yeah? Nobody saw anything important, after all."

She cowered behind Miss Armor Rep, who gave her some clothes. She looked at me, but her eyes were hollow voids.

"Please forgive me. I'm sorry, please spare me your wrath. I only ask for some clemency. I beg for your pardon. Spare me! I only ask that you do not lay your grasping hands on me. I beg of you, please. Forgive me, I'm sorry, I'm sorry..."

She's totally broken.

"Uh?"

Just to recap, I didn't do anything wrong. But I had a premonition that I was about to endure a twenty-person, forty-eight-hour-long relay race of lectures. About forty-six hours and fifty-two minutes of that lecture should go to the nerds, since it was their fault. I deserved no more than seven minutes of lecture. If the math didn't add up, the remainder should go to the meatheads, who insisted on the golem palanquin ending. *See? I didn't do anything wrong!*

A certain individual from the lowest floor of the great Ultimate Dungeon glared at me while that girl hid behind her. The girl should've been more worried about that dungeon emperor, since I was just a normal, run-of-the-mill teenager. Even if she patted you on the back to console you, she was definitely more terrifying than me. I was totally normal and not at all scary.

"Er, we're not gonna do anything to you, so don't worry. You'll be okay, y'know? It was just a malfunction. Well, the trap worked perfectly, but I'm sure there was some sort of malfunction."

This was all a big misunderstanding! The trap should've had a 120% chance of catching an old man, since by my calculations, they were 250% of the fantasy world's population!

"So right, it was totally a misidentification. A true malfunction that should *not* have happened, so I didn't do anything wrong. Right? Right, exactly! I didn't! Everyone always blames me for everything, but I'm the most innocent, friendly teenage boy in the world. Everything is okay, probably."

"...You're not going to be mean to me?"

Of course not, the old men are the real villains here! It was the Graybeard King's fault, I was sure of it. The more I thought about it, the more sure I was!

"I've never been mean a day in my life! If anything, I'm the one who always gets bullied! The meanest thing I've ever done was scorch a few nerd scalps, but they deserved it after the horrible psychological trap they put me—and you—through. Want some candy?"

She took the candy and ate it. *Yes! Problem solved!*

Giving away sweets seemed to resolve most social situations. The trick was to repeatedly insist that everything was fine while they ate candy. *Works every*

time! It looked alarming from the outside, I had to admit, but it worked. I hadn't yet figured out *what* was fine, but it was all definitely fine. She looked happy with her treats.

Jiggle jiggle.

The girl looked to be about the same age as Miss Armor Rep, maybe a little older. Many people in this world were blond, but her hair was more of a platinum blonde. She was beautiful, despite her black-hole eyes and the way she ravenously consumed the candy. I gave her one more piece of candy, hoping that it would spark some life into those soulless voids.

Jiggle jiggle.

Suddenly, an old man approached. *The culprit?!*

"I offer my most profound apologies," said Mr. Meridad, in his rambling way. "If only you had sent a messenger, I would have personally come to welcome you to the Duchy of Omui. For it is a true honor to meet you. I am Meropapa Sim Omui, and I am most humbled to make your acquaintance, Your Royal Highness, Princess Shalliceres."

The girl was some sort of princess. So, my dungeon just stripped a princess half naked and hoisted her up and down on a slab of rock. The nerds were destined for the gallows, without a doubt. After what they did, there was no way out but the noose. No other option.

"I came here on a military mission as a commander of the Royal Guard," she responded. "I have been defeated and captured, so you can skip the pleasantries. Having failed in my mission as an envoy, I am unworthy of your humility and your grace. Please raise your head, Duke Omui. It is good to see you once again."

So, they also knew each other. This conversation was going nowhere fast. They still hadn't decided on who should be apologizing. *Maybe I can head back to town, then?*

The pseudo-dungeon probably collected tons of equipment, so I could probably get quite a bit of coin if I sold it.

The armory in town was well stocked, but those weapons were too crappy for

my classmates. A lot of the equipment was destroyed by the pseudo-dungeon, but given how many attempts had been made, I was sure that there was plenty I could pawn. Actually, should I start charging admission for the pseudo-dungeon? I could even give prizes to any who could successfully navigate it! How did it take me so long to think of that?

“Uh, so you’re the first person to make it through the pseudo-dungeon, so that means you win a prize! Do you want a year’s worth of scrub brushes? Oh, or you can have more sweets, since you seem to like them.”

I couldn’t give her a year’s supply, though.

“Sweets consumption around here is practically infinite, and the manufacturer only makes them as a side hustle, so he’s always working overtime. Don’t you feel bad for me? It’s profitable, but I’m always sad, y’know? Besides, my profits keep mysteriously disappearing and I have to work even more! Also, eating nothing but candy for a year will make you fat, and I don’t want to get blamed for that. That’s why I recommend the scrub brushes?”

She preferred sweets, even though scrub brushes were so popular in town! She needed to have a scrub brush if she wanted to be trendy. Although, I didn’t want them either.

Mr. Meridad addressed me: “Pardon me, Haruka-kun. I do not wish for any scrub brushes myself, but please realize that you are addressing a princess. Perhaps if you could...that is to say, would you try to find within yourself even the smallest sliver of decorum? Don’t trouble yourself too much about it, but I thought I would share the suggestion with you. I merely thought that if you tried to speak a bit more politely that...ahh, it’s impossible, isn’t it?”

Whoopsies, was that a little rude? In my defense, when had manners ever gotten me anywhere? Never once in my life had I used fussy etiquette and prim politeness. Since I never thought to use politeness, maybe all those unused manners had piled up. At this point, I had so much politeness in my system that I only needed to use a small fraction of it to out-polite anyone around here. *I’ve got this.*

“I must apologize most humbly for the brusqueness of my manner, as I gave you those candies without realizing that I was in the august presence of the

Royal Princess. Perhaps you would like me to play a trick on you? After all, I gave you a treat, and the polite thing to do is to give you a trick. Ah, you see, this is a custom from my homeland. I am a traveler from a faraway land. Allow me to profusely express the honor I feel having now met you, Royal Girl. Oh, my apologies, I am sure you would prefer that I call you by your name, Princess Shillyshally, if I recall correctly.”

“No tricks, no tricks please. Please forgive me, spare me, don’t hurt me, don’t touch me, forgive me, do not lay your hands on me, forgive me, don’t do anything untoward with my body, please, I beg of you. No tricks, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, spare me...”

The light instantly vanished from her eyes, leaving a vast, empty cavern of darkness. *Should I peek into the abyss?*

Jiggle jiggle!

Huh? Slimey was against it.

“Haruka-kun... What I mean is... If I could make one suggestion, perhaps I was too rash in suggesting that you try to demonstrate the barest minimum of civility for the first time in your life. Your usual cryptic utterances are far less off-putting.”

Apparently, I was *too* polite now. I was so humble and self-effacing that it came across as a threat to public order.

The old man’s attendant cordoned me off by myself. The dungeon duo shook their heads as if embarrassed by something. Why did I, a human, get exiled, while those two got to be with everyone else? Now everyone else was ruining my day!

The Royal Girl, Shillyshally, was a princess, but also a general, and she was once a student of Mr. Meridad. So, that was how they knew each other. After the time that Meridad got attacked by bandits, his attendants had to restrain him from pursuing the thieves and fighting them himself. He was going to go wild and charge the bandits instead of commanding his guards! That was no person to learn from. Besides, charging in recklessly was my strategy.

Tossing the half-naked princess stuck to a slab of rock up and down in the air

was thankfully overlooked. If there had been tentacles involved, things would have been much worse. The nerds certainly deserve some light strangling and perhaps some scorched heads as a refreshing follow-up. They were the real villains.

“Why don’t we go to the castle and sit down instead of just standing around and chatting? I mean, we’re dealing with a princess here. Isn’t it an absolute breach of etiquette to not offer her a seat? This is the real entrance over here. The other one’s a trap.”

Why did everyone insist on talking outside when there was a literal castle, right there?

“Does that mean we have permission to enter, Haruka-kun?”

“Duke Omui, why are you asking his permission?” asked the princess. “That’s your castle, is it not?”

We entered the castle. The way to town was through the castle, anyway, and it would be time for dinner soon.

“The way to the great hall is over there. If you went this way, you’d find yourself outside the castle again. I didn’t feel like making a map, so feel free to explore as much as you want—watch out for that trap! That one would dissolve *all* of your clothes.”

“Are you—I’m sorry, please don’t hurt me, forgive me, please don’t dissolve all of my clothes, I’m sorry, I’m sorry...”

Jiggle jiggle!

I got yelled at simply for trying to give directions! Why? *I don’t get it.*

DAY 55

NIGHT

If it's a sexy female spy, they can't get mad at me for dissolving all her clothes or letting the tentacles loose on her.

THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON FORTRESS

I TRIED TO GO HOME after showing them to the great hall, but the attendant stopped me.

“Uh, isn't my job done? No one else is getting out of the pseudo-dungeon. No matter how much you get your hopes up, you won't see any naked old dudes. Are you actually hoping for that?!”

I thought that this attendant was the only reasonable person besides me, but it turned out he was the worst of all! *I gotta run, this place isn't safe!*

“Your Highness, Princess Shalliceres, this is ostensibly the great hall, but I feel that I need to apologize for bringing you to such a squalid pl—*ahem*, but that is not the case! It has plenty of charms, in its own way! I have no problems with this great hall; it is indeed quite spectacular. Thank you, Haruka-kun, it could not be any better! I would never dare complain about such a lovely great hall!”

“I'm not upset. If you have complaints, I can do some renovations for you,” I said. “What are a duke and a princess so scared about anyway? Put in your requests. I'll take 'em! Were there any traps you were hoping for?”

It was a bit haphazard, I had to admit. If an enemy spy broke into the castle, this was where they would end up. I wanted to spy-proof the place. Especially if the spy happened to be a sexy female spy!

And in the case of a sexy female spy, no one could complain about all her equipment and clothing getting dissolved...I could even possibly unleash the tentacles!

As for guys, a pitfall was all I needed. A pit deep enough that they never

returned.

“You’re going to install more traps? Melt my clothes again?! Please forgive me, I’m sorry, don’t hurt me, don’t melt my clothes, don’t hurt me, don’t touch me, have mercy, I’m sorry, I’m sorry...”

Miss Armor Rep’s death stare was palpable, a murderous glare.

Jiggle jiggle!

Even Slimey scolded me!

“I was just asking for input on my designs, and I ended up scaring the princess! Even my own servants are getting on my case now! Are you against renovation this much? Is the princess that set on new construction?”

This *was* new construction! I literally just built the place. It was as newly constructed as new construction could get! I didn’t know what the issue was, but it certainly wasn’t me. Because I didn’t do anything wrong!

“I asked previously, but this spectacular castle is yours, Duke Omui, is it not? Why...why are you asking this stranger from far away? You speak to him in such a casual manner, but is this the boy known as Lord Haruka? The one they say is a creepy pervert? Oh, pardon me—don’t do anything improper to me, forgive me, I’m sorry, have mercy...”

“H-hang on, you’re acting like that’s an apology but still treat me like I’m a perv! After all I did to help you out! Miss Armor Rep brought clothes for you, and Slimey formed a wall around you so nobody could see you. The dress is a little skimpy, but don’t worry about that; it just happened to be on hand. Well, it’s a pretty hot dress, and I *was* saving it for some improper activities if you know what I mean. The kind that lasts all night long, all night, but that’s a secret—oh, I’m just burning up thinking about it, like I have a fever!”

“Aha! I knew you put me in a dress like this so you could do improper things all night long! Please spare me, do not touch me, forgive me, have mercy, I’m sorry...”

Miss Armor Rep patted the princess on the back and gave me a fearsome glare. Well, I was just trying to be honest? Miss Armor Rep was playing the perfect silver-white knight role.

Mr. Meridad sighed with exasperation. Couldn't he do something to clear up these false allegations?

If anyone saw this scene, they would conclude that I was a black-hearted villain! I would get the scolding of a lifetime, no matter how innocent I actually was.

"Look, I don't actually want this nameless castle on a nameless land. That's why I'm gifting it to the nameless figure known only as Mr. Meridad. This is a gift he can't refuse, y'know, because it's useful? If it had a name, it would be even more useful. Maybe I should let Merimeri have the castle and I can name it Merimeri Castle. But that sounds a bit too merry, like a Merry Merry castle taken over by Merry Men. How about I give it to her mom and name it Murimuri Castle? Yeah, that sounds strong! Anyone who tried to invade it will totally get *murdered*, you know? With that kind of reputation, it's impregnable. I bet it could even handle a lover's quarrel!"

The castle was the second layer of protection after the pseudo-dungeon. If you made it through here, you'd reach unguarded frontier territory.

"Haruka-kun, no more! I lose all my lover's quarrels anyway. Can you not gift a personal castle to my wife?! I'd have to send the army to apologize to her and we would still all die! Please don't? And though I shouldn't have to remind you, I do have a name, as does my wife. Why do you only remember Muri and Meri? What about my name? I have one, too, don't I?"

The princess said that Mr. Meridad was known as a legendary knight, but he didn't sound so legendary if he always lost against his wife. Unless he became so strong in the first place simply to stand a chance when they quarreled? *I can relate to that.*

"Oh yeah, now that we're here, I kind of just remembered that there's nowhere to sit in the great hall. Yeah, let's go over to the conference room, there are seats there. Also, I don't know why I can't go home yet, but if I can't, can we at least decide what to do for dinner? If I don't figure it out soon, Slimey's gonna get grumpy, y'know? It's okay, Slimey."

We sat down in the conference room and they started their discussions. I

didn't know why talking was so complicated in a fantasy world. Maybe the grammar of the language here was weird or something. For some reason, nobody understood half the things I said unless the Class Rep interpreted for me.

"What?"

"Th-this place..."

I figured that if the great hall was an open and inviting space meant to impress people, the conference room next door should be a place to intimidate people.

In negotiations, words are weapons. So, the conference room needed an intense atmosphere, something that stunned people into silence. Carefully placed columns, a high ceiling, and a round table dead center made people feel like they were surrounded and insignificant: intimidation via architecture. It was a work of art in my opinion, even if nobody else would acknowledge it. I had to praise it myself because no one else would praise me.

"So, thanks for coming such a long way and all that jazz, sit back and relax, and so on and so forth. You don't need to stand. Sit. Seriously, can you sit down? Please? I mean, it's my first time here, too."

Sure, I designed it, but there was a world of difference between a blueprint and the finished product. It was like a stone cell, twisted into shape using a ludicrous amount of magic provided by MP batteries. *So, I guess it's a little rough.*

And at long last, the meeting, the discussion, the information exchange, the apologizing, the lecturing, or whatever the hell we were doing, began in earnest.

To summarize, the noble families in the center of the kingdom still believed that they could threaten the frontier into submission. They didn't even grant the princess a meeting, and ordered her to go to the front and try to fight...she knew the mission was doomed, but was willing to die in the attempt.

How idiotic. Idiots everywhere. This fantasy world was full of nothing but old men and other sorts of idiots—why did she obey orders even though she knew

they couldn't be accomplished?

I could understand if she were trying to protect something, but launching an invasion that couldn't be won was totally pointless. There was literally no benefit to risking her life on their orders.

Even the meatheads weren't this stupid! Even they weren't stupid enough to willingly die for no reason. Though they'd still die in battle if they weren't paying attention...were they stupid enough that they wouldn't even notice that they died?

"Haruka-kun, you're making the princess cry. Perhaps, you could forgive her for whatever offense she caused? Indeed, I feel a fair bit frightened when you stare so murderously like that. The princess was trying to protect the frontier by willfully losing with an army of elite soldiers. She was trying to stop the war using her own life as a sacrifice. So please, stop calling her names, Haruka-kun."

"Duke Omui!"

Mr. Meridad kneeled and bowed his head before the crying princess and me. I could barely contain my anger.

By showing the idiot nobles that the hand-picked elites were doomed to failure, she wanted to prove that victory was impossible. They were all imbeciles.

If you're going to fight until your whole force is destroyed, then fight those idiot nobles, I thought.

Going to the frontier just to die in some half-cocked grand gesture only hurt the kingdom. Those meatheads would have done the exact same thing. It was the right thing to do, but that didn't change how stupid it was.

"All right, no need to apologize and all that. I won't do anything, I swear. Don't worry about me; I'm just fuming, equal parts amazed and horrified at all this stupidity, y'know? I don't intend to do anything at all, okay? What's the point? There's no point in doing anything about a person who wants to die. If you wanted to live, I could do all sorts of things. I could try to rescue you, offer you help, give you candy, and so on. But if you want to die so bad, then I'm out

of here. I don't care, and I just want to go home."

"No matter how foolish it was, I had no choice," the princess protested. "There was no other way! If the noble families started fighting amongst themselves, it would tear the kingdom apart. This was the only thing I could do to try to protect the kingdom. What would you have had me do? What option am I not seeing? I wasn't willingly marching to my death. I had no choice!"

The princess held her sword, resolute and proud. Did she expect me to stop her? Actually, why did Miss Armor Rep hand the half-naked, heave-ho princess a sword while Slimey jiggled in support? She launched an attack strong enough to bully an innocent teenage boy into a meltdown.

"Well, I get where you're coming from, because the meatheads also don't understand anything unless it has to do with swords. If you kill Mr. Meridad, you'll fulfill your duty to the kingdom, and there'll be one less geezer running around in this world...okay, I'm on your side!"

"Lord Haruka, I would appreciate it if you don't encourage her. Indeed, if someone could stop her, that would be most appreciated!"

The blade, like the knight, was strong, sharp, and following an unwavering course. It was a powerful thrust. With her high stats and powerful skills, she wasn't aiming for Meridad after all. She took aim at me. Stepping aside, I pinned her arms behind her back.

The princess struggled to free her arms. "Unable to fight, unable to resist... humiliated, half-naked, and heave-hoed! Just kill me, already!"

Jiggle jiggle!

She had the heart of a warrior, the pride of a knight, and the dignity of a noble...and she wore a skimpy dress that spoke to a teenage boy's innermost desires...*yes, I can deal with this development! And these curves!*

"Who told you that fighting the nobles would tear the kingdom apart? Just overpower them and there you go. Problem solved. Surely, if you're strong enough, you could handle them. It's just so stupid to throw your life away. Death is the end. You can't do *anything* if you're dead. Do you get it yet? Well, unless you came back as a spooky ghost?"

I had totally lost my cool, and though I was shouting and flailing like a maniac, she couldn't hit me. Of course, someone willing to throw their life away could never hope to hit me. I tried to lead her attacks toward Meridad but he dodged them as well!

"Stay back, lad! I am not to be used as a shield! Please don't involve me in your fight! Princess, tell me what you truly desire. Don't give into despair!"

"But using you as a shield would help solve the problems of an aging populace, wouldn't it?"

The speed of her attacks increased, as well as their intensity. Mr. Meridad almost looked like he was performing a strange dance as he dodged the sharpened steel edge.

"Please stop, both of you! I cannot accept this! And refrain from using my body to block attacks! I'll pay you to leave me be!"

Cha-ching! Bonus!

"You got it, boss. Can't kill the man that pays you, as the saying goes!"

"She's trying to kill you, Haruka-kun! And that's a rather baffling way to address me!"

"Stop toying with me," the princess snarled. "Why...why can't I hit this mewling brat?!"

She couldn't fight monsters, lacked the might to overthrow the nobles...she wasn't as strong as she seemed, after all. A high level only counted for so much in a world of magic and monsters. *She's just a tragic idiot!* Could it be? Maybe she really was one of the meatheads?!

"How? Why can't I win?!"

She put more force behind her strikes. Though her eyes were wet with tears, a fire kindled within. Was she free of the terrible pseudo-dungeon trauma? *Either way, she's definitely a meathead!*

The psychological trauma she experienced in the pseudo-dungeon must have been quite bad, what with her being unable to hold her horses before going in and Slimey dogging her right after. *I can't take my eyes off her dress!*

“Princess, we had given up on all hope, just waiting for the day that the duchy would vanish from the world. Yet, we finally realized that we couldn’t allow that to happen. Princess, have you looked at the level of this boy?”

“The Royal Guard was willing to fight to the death by my side! I will not let their deaths be in vain! And yet—how?!”

“Look, if having a low level guaranteed death, I’d be in deep shit, but there’s no rule for that. If there was, that’d just suck, y’know?”

If an enemy could hit hard enough to kill me, I’d dodge their attacks, and if they had overwhelming defenses, I’d find their weakness. That was the obvious way to fight. Letting level be the deciding factor was just stupid. *And I can’t stop obsessing over the way she looks in that bewitching dress!*

The princess was more powerful than I expected. I didn’t know how much training and experience backed up her exhausting onslaught of attacks, but it wasn’t enough.

“How, why? Why won’t you fight back?!” she shouted as I dodged her every stroke.

She had dedicated her sword to fight on the frontier long ago. Her aim was true, never faltering. But it would never reach me.

The endless slaughter in the heart of the monster forest, the horrors I faced in depths of the Ultimate Dungeon—I was not the type of person to give in to despair.

“If I attacked you, then I’ll just look like a teenage boy who beat up a half-naked heave-ho girl with a wooden stick. That’d wreck my approval ratings! I can’t let that happen!”

Only a single blow would’ve been enough to kill me. Her strength eclipsed mine completely. But anyone who fell into the trap of only thinking about levels would eventually break. I would show her the arrogance of a boy who didn’t believe in any of it!

“Don’t mock me! Don’t act like you understand my reason for coming here! You’re not some omnipotent god!”

“Omuipotent? Is that what this place is called?”

“Omui!” Mr. Meridad shouted. “That was the closest you’ve gotten, but can we please focus on the matter at hand?”

The kingdom was rotten; worms had eaten away at its core, enemies both within and without. At some point, the princess must have given up on hope. Lost faith that her kingdom could survive. Just like the frontier. At some point, they even gave up on fighting for their future.

Parrying my blow, her graceful steps drifted back. Her eyes opened wide. She understood. She learned the true meaning of terror.

The terror of not being able to kill something because they refused to give up, regardless of skills, levels, and even chance itself.

“Tch! But why? Why?!”

She realized that her sword could never reach me. Her dream, so close to being within reach, would never come to fruition. Death was only an excuse. I could see in the force of her stare that she would gladly die if it meant she could kill me.

“So, this is your true power,” said Mr. Meridad. “I heard that even Merielle could not lay a finger on you, but to think you were this mighty!”

Even with her overwhelming level advantage, she couldn’t hit me. The most powerful skills in the world wouldn’t help. The fear she felt, it was the fear that there was nothing she could do to close the gap between us. The terror of fighting something that couldn’t be killed.



“You are well trained,” said Meridad, addressing the princess. “You are strong. But nothing more.”

Wiggle wiggle.

The princess believed that she only needed to be strong enough to make her wishes come true. But that was just a mask for weakness, a road to despair. Strength was strength, nothing more.

As a swordfighter, she should have understood. The terror of death was ephemeral, fleeting. There was a gulf of difference between skill and talent. She should have known: the dead did not feel fear, or anything at all.

With a high-pitched whine, her sword shattered, and I held my staff pointed at the base of her neck.

Quietly, I asked, “Do you want to die?”

It was a cruel question. She probably didn’t have anything left to say. Today, she saw what came after death—nothingness. Running away from it wouldn’t change anything for her.

Yikes! That was risky. The skimpy dress was way too distracting! My eyes kept wandering in all the wrong directions and I almost got stabbed dozens of times! It was a sexy trap! *Sounds like a new business venture to me.*

“I...I want to live. I want to fight...for my kingdom. For my people.”

Huh? She didn’t want to die? In that case, she deserved more sweets. Naturally, the dead didn’t eat sweets.

“Some things are just out of your control,” I said. “If you can’t do anything, you can’t do anything, y’know? Who cares about what happens to a useless kingdom run by useless nobles? They refuse to change and that’s on them. They’re already done for. If they didn’t want the kingdom to tear itself apart, they shouldn’t have done things that would lead to that, y’know? There’s no point in dying in vain for a lost cause, y’know? How would you have saved them, anyway? Pointless self-sacrifice? You’d be better off killing them rather than dying! Death is pretty final, and you won’t be able to eat any more candy!

Oh, speaking of, here you go. More sweets.”

Good food was reason enough to live. Dying for the sake of the future, or to carve your name into the annals of history—those were bullshit reasons.

“These are called sweet potatoes, and according to Stalker Girl, they’re ‘yam-azing.’ Stalker Girl was also about to die, but she didn’t, and now she eats candy every single day! If she died, she couldn’t do that, right? So, try to live, okay? Throwing your life away for the sake of the kingdom—why bother? Death is the final punctuation on life. Well, for the most part. There are a few cases of people coming back to life.”

The person standing by my side and nodding her head in agreement was a notable exception. She used to be a cute skeleton before she came back to life. Now she lived her life to the fullest, every single day. That was a great example to live by—she refused to lay down and die even after death.

I mean seriously, who actually would want to die? The frontier was full of people who never gave up, who kept fighting to survive. There was really no point in dying so easily.

DAY 55

EVENING

If, in the far future, the fantasy world becomes fully modernized, teenage boys won't be able to concentrate in class either.

THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON FORTRESS

THE FORMER DUNGEON EMPEROR, Miss Armor Rep, patted the sobbing princess on the back and tried to cheer her up, while I threw dinner together. The scene was pure chaos.

The loose ends had nothing to do with me. If they needed something, they would call me. I wasn't even a citizen of this kingdom; no one even told me its name!

Mr. Meridad said, "Please let me deal with the remaining issues, Haruka. My army and I might seem unreliable to you, but I am a noble of this kingdom, and this is my responsibility. As the Duke of Omui, it is my duty to set things right, not the princess's. This is what it means to be a ruler. I may be an incompetent leader who could not save my people or bring them prosperity, but you must let me deal with the nobles myself, I beg this of you."

Honestly, he didn't even need to tell me that. I was only here because he asked for my help. I didn't want to be involved! And they took such a long time to say anything. I just came to do some maintenance on the pseudo-dungeon. I didn't have anything to do with the future, or the kingdom. I didn't even know where this kingdom *was*!

If I got dragged into a war, the girls would end up fighting. That was the purpose of all their training. They were preparing to fight other humans.

Unlike monsters, humans had a variety of skills and the intelligence to use them effectively. I was probably the least suited for massive battles against

other people. In other words, wars. In anticipation of this, they were training for it all along.

I also have felt like I owed a debt to what's-his-face. I'd dirtied my hands. I was on the same path he was. The nerds were preparing for naval battle, and the meatheads practiced guerrilla warfare in the woods. That being so, there had to be someone pulling the strings, preparing them for war, who I did not notice—it could only be the Book Club President!

I had secretly made ten bags for her, and she went and betrayed me like this! I used leather of the finest quality, only to be stabbed in the back!

I couldn't participate in any war. If I did, I would end up dragging my classmates into it. Which meant we'd be screwed—our future, destroyed. *I'll charge way more for those bags from now on!*

Mr. Meridad rambled on: "Haruka-kun, I know that you have great strength. Even so, I don't want to involve you in my wars. You are hopelessly ill-suited for war. I will never ask you to fight for our cause. You try to save everyone, even complete strangers. So, I would never ask you to kill a stranger. Killing would only hurt you. The stronger you are, the more scars you will bear. The same goes for your companions. Their hearts are too full of kindness. War is no place for that sort of kindness. You don't belong on the battlefield.

"You bear our hopes and dreams for a better future. We cannot thank you enough for all you have done for the frontier. The hopes you have would wither if you shed the blood of other people. War would only corrupt your dreams.

"I will handle matters of war, and you will keep the dream alive; the dream that the people of the frontier almost forgot. For the sake of that dream, save the frontier, and let it see the light of day once and for all."

He thought way too much and he talked even more. But he was right, the girls weren't suited to war.

The guys, on the other hand, were fine—especially the meatheads. They were unstoppable when it came to fighting other people, no matter the scale of battle. Even demons weren't as brutal as them—I would sooner live in hell than fight against them. They wouldn't care about how many bodies they had to bury if they were fighting bad guys.

The nerds hated fighting, but they would, whining the entire time, but without ever retreating.

After a lifetime of getting bullied, they could endure an endless amount of suffering if it was for someone they trusted. Once they were set in their purpose, nothing short of death would dissuade them.

But the girls, they were just normal girls. They tried to appear resolute, but they still thought of their families. They still hid their tears, worried about their friends, and tried not to make others worry about them. No matter how much they pretended to be stoic, it was obvious that they were sensitive and gentle. Though the girls tried to hide it, they were fundamentally soft-hearted.

It was different for us outcasts, we had nothing to go back to. The old world, the past, was dead to us.

You can't just steel your resolve so easily.

It wasn't anything so easy as overcoming stage fright.

In the worst-case scenario, the nerds and meatheads would go to war while I stayed in the frontier to keep the girls out of it. That wouldn't be so bad. They were unkillable beasts. They wouldn't fall so easily.

Jiggle jiggle.

Right, gotta focus on dinner.

"Order up! I made some cutlet burgers; the soldiers can have some too. Better yet, I'll just set the food out in the great dining hall, and they can swarm over it and struggle and feast. That's the way of old men, isn't it?"

First, I had to show the old men the way to the great dining hall. It was awfully inconvenient that none of them had the Map skill.

"Princess, Mr. Meridad, where do you want to eat? You can just eat here, but it's all food you can eat while standing, so you can eat while looking out from atop the castle ramparts. It's not a bad view, but it'll hurt if you happen to fall over the edge. I've bumped into a few things in my day, and falling from the castle wall would hurt even more than that. Trust me on this one."

Mr. Meridad gave me a strained smile. I was glad, even if the smile didn't

reach his eyes. This world was too grim to take seriously all the time. Even pretending to be serious was exhausting. I couldn't help but laugh.

Regarding the frontier alone, a defensive strategy was more than sufficient. There was no chance anyone could both traverse the pseudo-dungeon and conquer Murimuri Castle. It just wouldn't be worth it.

Supposing that the kingdom's army re-conquered the frontier, then if they wanted spellstones, they would have to hunt monsters themselves. In that case, they could've saved themselves all the trouble by sending soldiers to help the frontier hunt monsters.

They wanted to make money without having to lift a finger, but now they had to do something. Unfortunately for them, an invasion was not worth the cost.

Indeed, they were thoroughly screwed, but couldn't admit it to themselves. But now the princess had made her move, and Mr. Meridad had an opportunity to respond. The kingdom certainly wasn't expecting that.

I definitely didn't expect a half-naked heave-ho incident to be the shot heard round the world.

If such an event were to kick off a war, it'd be known as the Half-Naked Heave-Ho War, right? I would feel so sorry for anyone who was referred to as a victim of the Half-Naked Heave-Ho War. The victors would not want to acknowledge their victory either. *Such a terrible name.*

Shit, this war has to stop so that it won't get mentioned in any future history books. In a distant future that becomes so modern that it even has high school boys, they would have to learn about the Half-Naked Heave-Ho War in history class!

High school boys won't even be able to concentrate in class, I thought. They're teenage boys! They would certainly pay attention, but for all the wrong reasons! Though I hope they include pictures!

DAY 55

NIGHT

The Kingdom of Somewhere and King X have got some 180-degree 360-degree international crises.

THE WHITE LOSER INN

NEWTS TRAVELED FAST, rumors traveled faster, and vague rumors fastest of all. The first one to share the news had a head start, and whoever spread the word fastest won.

Stalker Girl had completely scooped me! She broke the Half-Naked Heave-Ho news before I got back! But her version was nothing but lies!

“Why did you strip a princess half-naked and toss her into the air?!”

“Turn yourself in, I’ll see you in jail!”

“N-no, it wasn’t me! The golems were just carrying her. It’s not what it looks like! Look, Slimey is jiggling, he’s a witness, that proves my innocence! Right, Slimey?”

“Slimey jiggles no matter what’s happening!”

Stalker Girl munched happily on the sweets she earned from selling her so-called intel. *Uh, I was the one who made those...?*

“But what’s this about the half-naked princess having to get down on all fours?! What exactly did you do to her?!”

“I didn’t do anything. You’ve got it all wrong! She just ended up in that position, then the golems picked her up! Miss Armor Rep, tell them! You were there!”

Miss Armor Rep averted her eyes. My witness refused to testify, implying that I was guilty!

“We heard that the princess kept sobbing, and repeating, ‘don’t touch me!’

And while you're at it, you can explain what you meant when you told her about your 'all-night feverish passion!'"

"B-but I didn't...well, I did say that repeatedly, but it's not what you think! I never touched her—I only plied her with candy! I'm innocent! Giving candy to pretty girls is completely innocent, right? Right?"

Now that I've set the record straight, I need to calm down.

"I mean, I'm the one who saved her, which is why I'm innocent. Luckily, I spotted the princess caught in that trap with Jupiter Eye, and immediately sent Miss Armor Rep to give her clothes, and then I asked Slimey to form a barrier around her, to keep anyone from seeing her half-naked! And since I hurried to do this as fast as possible, you can ignore that the dress is a little short, right? I'm telling you, no one saw anything. Everything is fine!"

"Found her with Jupiter Eye—so you *did* see her!"

Caught red-handed.

"And you're claiming that you saved her from those traps, but *who* set them?"

The smoking gun.

"B-but the nerds came up with the idea, and the meatheads approved it! If I went with their original proposal, she would've been completely nude and attacked by tentacle monsters."

"Oda-kun..." the Class Rep growled, scanning the room. "They ran away! After them!"

"Sir, yes, sir!" the girls shouted.

The nerds were on the run, but the girls were in pursuit. *Good, I'll be glad if they're caught.*

I wanted to join the hunt too, but I was still getting lectured. But I clearly didn't do anything wrong, as the real perps were on the lam!

The thing was, that trap would only activate when a complex set of conditions were met, and that wasn't likely to happen.

“You told me that I couldn’t treat melting the clothes off of men and women in the same way, so I couldn’t send her back to the entrance to meet a bunch of half-naked old men. So, that final trap, which was unlikely to trigger, happened to heave-ho her up to the castle! It was a freak accident!”

The chances of that happening were way lower than winning the lottery. That particular trap getting triggered was a once-in-a-lifetime miracle. *In other words, don’t blame me, blame yourself or God!*

“Your chances of an innocent verdict in this case are way lower than winning the lottery!”

“Guilty on all counts!”

It required a precise sequence of unlikely events to occur. It was a contingency that triggered when all the men fell for every single trap except for the final one. For the victim to be the group’s commander...the odds were nothing short of miraculous.

Did the princess have that kind of luck? Did she trigger titillating events? In that case, I had to keep tabs on her. But from a distance—if I got wrapped up in any sort of event like that, I’d never hear the end of it.

They began talking about what to do regarding the current political situation. *Why? We don’t know anything about the kingdom at all!*

“Why should we do anything? It’s not our problem, y’know? We’re just travelers staying at a local inn on a long-term basis. I mean, even if King X from The Kingdom of Somewhere showed up and was like, ‘Hey babes, let’s party!’ it still wouldn’t have anything to do with us. Though I’d tweak that guy’s head a bit. Maybe turn it 360 degrees. That way no one will notice anything different. The kind of king who would rather party than attend to state matters has to be stopped, so I’ll just twist his head 180 degrees at a time. Problem solved!”

Now I knew who the real villain was: the Party King!

“No! I don’t know what the king is like, but don’t just decide that he’s some kind of party animal who needs his head twisted off!”

“Although, if he said something gross like ‘Hey babes, let’s party,’ he deserves to get his head twisted,” the Queen Bee said.

“But no more than 180 degrees. A 360-degree twist will cause an international incident!”

“We’re supposed to be talking about the war on the horizon, not how many degrees the king’s head should twist! This isn’t solving anything!”

“But a Party King isn’t necessarily some sort of obnoxious party bro. We need to verify these things!”

“Yeah, The Party King might be a chill guy who says stuff like ‘No war, broski, let’s chillax,’ right? Hmm, actually, let’s twist his head off.”

Jiggle jiggle.

The Party King was the true villain! We were summoned to this fantasy world in order to wreck his lame-ass parties!

“I suspect that if we defeat the Party King, party bros will stop spawning. We just need to get to the bottom of his party dungeon and kill him. Then, his party dungeon will die, the party bros will go extinct, and all our problems will be solved!”

“It sounds right when you say it like that, but this is totally incorrect!”

“Haruka-kun, don’t you know the difference between a dungeon and a palace?”

“I think he just confused the words *mansion* and *dungeon*,” said Vice Rep A. “Oh, is that why he keeps trying to buy a dungeon?”

“He didn’t seem to know the difference between the Duke of Nallogi and an orc, either.”

“First, we need to teach him the difference between discussion and destruction,” said the Book Club President. “How could a kid who reads so many books have so much trouble with words? In any case, without more information, there’s nothing we can do. We need to prioritize extracting intel from the princess, figuring out which nobles could be swayed to our side and which ones are enemies, and deciding on how to deal with those enemies.

There's no point in talking about it now."

The treacherous Book Club President was clever with words, but she was obviously trying to embroil the girls in a war! After all those bags I gave her, I still couldn't believe she betrayed me!

It all made sense. But what was she thinking? Why did she predict a war that I was sure couldn't happen? She had been preparing for it, too.

Mr. Meridad also told me to keep us uninvolved, so there was no reason to make a move just yet.

We still had to finish off the remaining dungeons that grew past 50 floors, and develop the frontier to the point of economic independence. Even if a military clash did loom, my economic war could render it unnecessary. The frontier wasn't yet on the same level as the kingdom, though.

We needed our economy to become self-sufficient enough and our armies to become large enough to convince the kingdom that we could secede. If we could also contain the risk of dungeons overflowing, then we could restart negotiations with a clear advantage. So, we discussed our plans for dungeon delving tomorrow.

I heard the piercing screams of the now-captured nerds faintly in the distance. *Obnoxious, as always.*

AFTERWORD

THANK YOU FOR STICKING AROUND for the fourth volume. Sometimes I think to myself, *What happened here?!* And if any of you poor souls bought and read all four volumes at once...I'm so, so sorry. (Nervous sweat.)

Just as I was getting excited to write about the kingdom in this volume, the story ended up being about the frontier again. I guess that's only natural for a book about a shut-in. We progressed from the woods in the first volume to the city in the second, then in the third volume to the whole domain...and now back to the city. Oops.

And now that I've finally gotten around to this volume, to Overlap's general shock, I introduced the monster you've all been waiting for. Yes, I mean Slimey.

I'm sure plenty of you are surprised that this has made it all the way to a fourth volume, but that's no less surprising than how long we kept the story up as the #1 ranked novel online, and definitely less surprising than the story getting adapted for a serialized manga! All these surprises have been so unbelievably shocking as to send me into a trembling Polnareff state, so utterly unable to move that I'm afraid people might actually be mad at me.

Those of you who read Volume 3 might have an idea of what's going on, but I'm not so cheap as to shortchange you with only a one-page afterword! Oh no, you got a *five*-page afterword last time! But it was all my editor Y-san's fault. he was the one who gave me pages to spare.

Anyway, I posted this novel on the website *Shousetsuka ni Narou* (Let's Be Novelists!) without the slightest intention of becoming a novelist. At first, I practically incited a riot for not including enough sex, and now it's in the 18+ section of the website. Even my manga editor Shizuka-sama grinned and said to me, "When did this series get so horny?!" This time around, I went all-in. (Editor Y-san was very excited about the naked heave-ho.) Yup, it's all up to Saku Enomaru-san to decide just how spicy things get. No pressure.

And in spite of all that pressure, thank you, Saku Enomaru-sama, for the wonderful illustrations for volume 4! He sent me multiple rough drafts asking me for my opinions, which we debated over for quite some time. But thank you again for your beautiful illustrations.

We started off with booota-san, went over to Bibi-san for the manga, and now we have Saku Enomaru-san. It's an all-star line-up strong enough to fool you into thinking that this series has some sort of genius editor behind it. I've been told by some people that I could probably sell this series without the text, and to be honest, I think it'd probably sell *more* without it. (Just kidding! Maybe.)

Thank you as well to all the editors over at Overlap and Comic Gardo. Or more like...I'm terribly sorry? (More nervous sweat.)

"The best mochi is from the mochi shop." This is a saying that goes back to the Edo period, when families used to make their own mochi, but eventually realized that a specialty store does it best. Ask a fisherman about the ocean, a lumberjack about the forest, a packhorse driver about horses, a sake shop about sake and a tea shop about tea...so I outsourced the entire novel to real profess—*ahem*, never mind! I'm sorry for making everyone else do the work!

I also extend my heartfelt thanks and apologies to Ouraidou-sama, who had to deal with never-before-seen typos and errors mind-boggling enough to make the entire editorial staff scream. I sent in a pure-white manuscript, and it came out bloodred...sorry for causing you so much trouble.

And while I may have gotten back a manuscript covered in bloody scars, the feedback online was even worse. My readers sent me back a monumental load of errors and corrections, which then needed additional corrections after I fixed them, resulting in sheer chaos, so I really appreciate everyone's edits and feedback.

Eventually, I had the divine revelation that my manuscripts will be fixed without me checking for errors myself. So now I write in a complete state of denial.

Sakuga999-sama also made a Japanese Wikipedia page for *Loner Life in Another World*. Thank you so much. It also helped me out quite a bit. It's more

detailed than the novels. (The web novel is way ahead of the published editions, so beware of spoilers.)

Somewhere along the way, people around me caught wind of what I was doing, and the other day my friend came up to me like, “Your book is selling in stores?! Why didn’t you say anything?!” What a strange conversation. I guess they figured my book wasn’t the type to actually get placed on a bookshelf in a bookstore, although I’m a bit confused what other types of books there are? I suppose that I am the reader-type, but not exactly the sort of person who would write a novel. Actually, that very friend was a source of inspiration for Haruka-kun!

I’ve written four of these so far, and every time there’s no end to the thanks (and apologies) that I could give out. But until the day Y-san actually means it when they say, “you wrote just the right number of pages,” I suppose I’ll be continuing to thank all of you over and over and over again.

Yup. He didn’t mean it this time, either.

Now then...will there be another volume? And will it be the right number of pages?! It’s a bit of thrill and suspense separate from the actual story, but thank you once again for reading this volume. I am so happy that you have continued to stick around for the ride.

—SHOJI GOJI



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